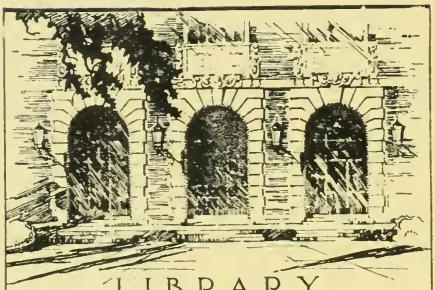

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THE TOWER.

It was drawing nigh sunset on the eve of September 1, A. D. 1667, a date of terrible omen to the great city, within whose walls the opening events of our history took place. London lay bathed in a glorious autumnal sun, and was sinking into that busy tranquillity which marks the close of labour in the great hives of human industry. Shops were closing in all security, the burgher's early supper smoked on the table, the watch set their rounds on

the city walls, and gamesome 'prentices sallied forth on their evening recreations.

The river presented an aspect of peculiar tranquillity. It was the Sabbath eve, a day held scrupulously sacred by the great mass of the people, which was still puritan. The immense fleet of merchantmen from every nation stretched along the river; the barges and gilded wherries of the citizens, decorated with streamers and flags, were drawn up along the quays and wharfs, as if they too had a right to their seventh day's rest.

The gray ramparts and turrets of the Tower were lighted up with Italian brilliancy, in the rich colours of the sunset, and were decked out in holiday splendour, with innumerable banderols, above which floated, on the highest tower, the gorgeous banner of England. The great bell, which usually summoned the inhabitants within the fortress limits before the gates closed, was tolling, and divers belated persons were hurrying towards them.

Among these, riding at a jaded pace, appeared a solitary horseman. He was mounted on a powerful nag, whose original colour was probably white, but it was at present a dirty brown, and splashed and travel-stained from head to heel. The harness was

strong and heavy, according to the fashion of the period, and the rider was a tall, well-made man, who wore a high hat with feathers, a travelling-cloak of scarlet, and huge jack-boots with long spurs. His under dress, which seemed a sort of livery of orange-coloured cloth slashed with silver, was visible, from the mantle having slipped off his left shoulder, as if to cover a kind of bundle which he carried. A pair of very large pistols, or rather blunderbusses, decked his holsters—ornaments by no means superfluous in that enterprising age, when so many "gentlemen" picked up a livelihood as *attorneys-errant.* In fact, the whole appearance of the rider was that of a dashing retainer to some noble house, only he wore no badge, and that part of the breast which is usually decked, was patched over with new velvet. Still his air was so jaunty and bold, that the warder whom he addressed at the postern respectfully sank his partisan.

"Hollo, brother!—canst tell me if Master Lieutenant be in the Tower; and if so, where a man must seek who hath affair with him?"

"Art from over sea?—methinks thy tongue smacks something popishly," replied the warder.

"If my English be good enough to be under-

stood, trouble thyself no further," said the stranger, haughtily. "If not, I shall not mend it for so poor a customer. And now prithee, let me pass. I have business with thy betters, which may not be delayed."

"Hast thou the pass-word, good friend?" returned the warder, grasping his weapon, and seeming to eye both horse and man with no prejudice in favour of either.

"No, but I bear an order from the council to your lieutenant, sealed with the king's seal, which I must deliver in person to his honour. Here's warrantry enough, companion." And the stranger produced a paper, directed as he had affirmed, which he thrust under the warder's gaze.

"Pass!" was the reply, and the cavalier, touching his horse with the spur, entered the gate. He found himself in a small quadrangle, hemmed in by lofty battlements, in which not a single human being seemed stirring. The clatter of his horse's hoofs, however, almost instantly attracted attention. An old man popped his head out of a barred window above, and after listening to the horseman's account of his object, civilly offered to guide him to the lieutenant's presence.

A hale-looking veteran, with cheeks as ruddy as apples, though his hair was nearly white, now made his appearance. He stated, however, that the lieutenant, Sir John Robinson, was at supper with some friends, and that if the business were not very pressing it would be better to wait till his honour had done, offering meanwhile a stoup of canary and a seat by a good fire to the stranger, who returned his thanks for this civility in a somewhat foreign tone and manner, but declared that his errand required immediate despatch. Then carelessly throwing the reins to the old man,

"Prithee," he said, with an easy air of superiority, "prithee, father graybeard, hold my nag's head, lest I stumble and break my youngster's skull, and thereby waste a soul which may be valuable when it is grown."

"What youngster, friend? I see none," said the old man.

"Look here then; thou art old, but didst ever see a prettier creature?" said the cavalier, lifting his cloak, and revealing a young child nestling asleep in its warmth.

"Hast been in Heaven kidnapping cherubs?"

exclaimed the old man, gazing with admiration at the beauty of the little sleeper.

"Nay, faith, if all were told, rather in t'other place," said the stranger, drily. "Hillo, mignon! c'est la reveillée!" And he chucked his bloomy cheek till the child awoke.

"And is this fair boy your son?" said the Tower-dweller, receiving the child softly in his arms.

"It is not quite agreed whose son he is, camarado," replied the traveller, springing deftly from his saddle. "But I flatter myself 'tis not impossible. Morbleu! how a man's feet ache after a ten hours' ride! Prithee, hast any corner in which to bestow this reeking piece of horseflesh?"

"There is a hostel in the next yard, whither I will take it when I have shown you to the lieutenant; but methinks there is not much fear of his turning runaway?"

"Never trust a horse or a woman," said the traveller, throwing the rein round a projecting stancheon. "But now he is secure; give me the child and lead on, gaffer."

The old man complied with a smile, and opening a door, admitted them into a small chamber, ap-

parently a guard-room, from the military accoutrements scattered about. Thence they mounted a narrow flight of stairs, and entered a corridor, the long perspective of which terminated in massive folding-doors. The old man made a new effort as they went to gratify his curiosity by inquiring if the stranger came to see any of the prisoners in the Tower; and if so, belike some of those confined as abettors in the late popish conspiracy in Dublin. The stranger merely replied that he knew not his errand till Sir John informed him. The old man nodded significantly, and said no more until they reached the portal, at which he tapped. A tall lackey instantly appeared, exchanged a few words in a whisper, and the door was thrown open. The cavalier then doffing his plumed hat, stepped boldly forward into the apartment, making a courtly reverence to Master Lieutenant and his company.

It was a large square chamber, with two bow-windows, opening on the river, and richly furnished; a table in the middle being set out with much glitter and luxury of viands. At this sat three personages. One, a grave middle-aged man, with hair curling in iron-gray masses on his shoulders, was evidently the lieutenant, from a warder stand-

ing behind his chair with a massive bunch of keys. The next was as evidently his guest; a tall, well-made man, with a fat large-featured face, half-buried in a scented peruke. He had an habitual smile on his lips, and somewhat weak but lively eyes. He was dressed in the richest fashion of the time, bedizened in velvet, lace, and gold embroidery, with several lustrous rings on his plump white hands. The third at table was a lady past her meridian, but with the remains of great beauty, which she had done her best to revive by all the resources of the toilet, being rouged, patched, jewelled, and laced in profusion. Moreover she had a voluptuous cast of features, and an eye whose expression did not appear much chastened by her matronly years and station.

The two latter persons looked at our traveller with some curiosity, and Sir John returned his salute with a stare and a nod.

"Well, sir, your peremptory purpose with us, which could not wait till we ate our strawberries?" said the lieutenant, scrutinizing his visiter. He perceived a face slightly marked with the smallpox, distinguished by a very resolute and audacious expression, and a profusion of light mustaches and

beard. His eye fell then on the boy, who seemed about four or five years old, and who stood gazing at him with a fine startled eye, as if in wonder. The child's figure was slight but tall for his age, his complexion extremely fair, and features so beautiful, that it was hardly possible to look at him without interest. His hair was long, and curled in brown ringlets down his back. He was dressed in a very rustic style, in a short coat of gray fustian, yellow stockings, and a wide-brimmed hat buckled with a leaden clasp.

"Please your honour, my purpose is best explained in this paper," said the traveller, in reply to Sir John's question. The lieutenant caught a glimpse of the seal, and took the letter with a very important a-hem! Then carefully cutting the silk string, he opened the paper, and read the contents with a grave and thoughtful brow. Meanwhile the gentleman at table played with the tassel of his doublet, and the lieutenant's wife took a deliberate survey of the traveller's person and equipments.

"Come hither, man," said Sir John, walking to one of the windows; "I must gauge you a little, to see you have no smuggled goods in your hold. Know you the contents of this rescript?"

and courtly presence," replied the lady, carelessly glancing at the boy. "Good truth! there is resemblance enough to make out a case before any justice in the land; but the child is fairer, and hath a merrier eye. How deem you, Mr. Pepys?"

"I never saw his lordship but once, and then for a moment through an iron grating," replied the gentleman.

"Oh fie, Mr. Pepys! I warrant me you have seen him oft enough at the Queen's popish chapel, whither they say you are not so unfrequent a visiter as suits the times," replied the fair hostess, with a significant smile.

"Good faith, lady, 'tis a false report of mine enemies," said Mr. Pepys, eagerly; when Sir John interrupted him somewhat rudely—

"Well, well, Monsieur Deville, or Duval, or what's your name?—we will indulge the earl in this matter for once. Mark you, for *once*. Where is the man who came with you? Oh, Edwards," he said, as the old man emerged from a gilded screen, "take the keys of Lord Aumerle's apartment, and guide this gentleman to his presence. Lock them up together for an hour—no longer."

"Alone, your honour?" said Edwards, with a dubious glance.

"Yes, alone. Wherefore not?" replied Sir John, with a sharp glance at his wife. "The order is so worded. An' they were fox and goose, they were ill left together for an instant."

"Bring the child hither, Master Duval," said the lady, with a tart smile at this last observation. "I would give him some fruit and a fairy-like tasse of sherris, if his rustical poll can bear such unwont luxury."

"And merrily too," said Claude. "And if the goblet were a thought deeper, I would humbly crave leave to drink so fair a lady's health."

"Thou art a bold companion, friend," said Sir John, with a glance full of suspicion.

"Thou shalt have it, for the valour of asking," pursued the lady, with a spiteful smile at her husband. "Mr. Pepys, pray you fill that tankard with the Burgundy at your elbow, and give it this good varlet, to drink our health."

The cavalier obeyed with alacrity, and Sir John, throwing himself into his arm-chair, began cracking nuts and humming a tune, affecting to look with indifference on the river. Claude, meanwhile,

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took his goblet with a profusion of French acknowledgments, and pledging the lady-lieutenant's health, drained it to the dregs. The boy imitated him directly, and as if conscious of the mimicry, laughed as he set down his little glass, with a smack of the lips which feebly echoed Duval's. He accepted a bunch of grapes from the lady with the same frankness, but the lieutenant, as if weary of the scene, abruptly desired Edwards to lead the way. Claude took the boy in his arms, where he was kissed by the fair hostess herself, with many commendations of his beauty. Edwards received the bunch of keys from the warder, and escorted them out, Claude bowing rather to the lady than to her potent lord, as he made his exit.

"Marry, Mr. Pepys, and a very proper man of his calling," said the lady.

"Faith, madam, he hath rogue as plainly lurking in his eye as any fellow I know unhanged," replied the cavalier, who was carefully peeling an apple. "But now let me offer your ladyship a sweet sample of the same rich fruit which tempted Madam Eve—good troth, a love-apple!"

"This Claude Duval will as certainly come to the rope as his master to the axe," said Sir John,

rising, and walking hastily up and down. "He hath gallows-bird labelled on his forehead."

"Marry, then it will be for some offence that hath full as much mirth as mischief in it," replied his gay wife. "What say you, Mr. Pepys?"

"But is it assured my Lord Aumerle will come to the block?" said Mr. Pepys, making no reply but an expressive smile.

"No doubt, as soon as the Londoners need a victim, or the court a peace-offering," replied Sir John. "He hath three potent enemies—his religion, his wife, and himself."

"His wife!" echoed Pepys, with great incredulity, as if the thing were totally impossible.

"Yes, sir, his wife," said the lieutenant, gloomily. "The bitterest enemy a man has oft lies in his bosom. They have been separated these several years; scarce one year married, ere Madam eloped with that profligate, my Lord Howard of Eskricke. But Heaven be praised, he is as poor as a rat or a cavalier, and they are suffering bitter poverty."

"Better is a fast in love than a feast in hate," said the lady, with a gay glance at Mr. Pepys. "But I never heard till now she had such cause for her hatred as this fair child would seem to

witness; I always thought he loved her most unmeasuredly. However, if this accusation of the villanous Irish traitor, Blood, prove founded—the axe will rid her not only of a man she abhors, but make her the richest woman in England. She is his cousin, Mr. Pepys, and heir to his title and vast possessions, he having no lawful issue."

"Good Lord!—and who knows—mayhap she is at the bottom of it all!" said Pepys, turning up his eyes. "Good lack, the wickedness of women! (craving your ladyship's pardon)—But perchance the poor earl may be as innocent as myself. From all that I hear, he has only his popish religion, a wicked woman, and the mad fury of the rabble against him."

"Enough and to spare to bring him to the sawdust," said Sir John.

"Marry, the earl is too obstinate," replied the lady; "he hath ever refused to divorce his wife, though she swears she will die sooner than return to him. They say she was forced to marry him too by her old savage of a father, and Howard, I know, was her first love; and first or second loves are very hard to root out, Mr. Pepys.—But good lack, now I remember, I promised to show you

my Italian violets on the south terrace. Prithee, Sir John, will you go with us?"

"Nay, wife, I must take my rounds—you know it is the hour," he replied with affected cheerfulness; "I dare trust Mr. Pepys with your ladyship, though the times are not so virtuous that a man should trust his own brother—but Mr. Pepys is married, and I could avenge me—ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the guest, rising, and with courtly grace assisting the lady to put on her mantle and hood. "But that were a poor revenge, Sir John, seeing how marvellously your lady hath the advantage of mine in beauty!"

Then offering his arm with a deep bow, and carrying his plumed hat in his hand, Mr. Pepys stepped forth into the corridor, with my lady-lieutenant's white hand reposing on his velvet sleeve.

Sir John looked after them for a moment, shaking his fist with affected playfulness, and then threw himself into his chair with a deep sigh, when his eye suddenly encountered the motionless figure of the warder behind. He instantly attempted to sing, but with such bad success that, annoyed at his own failure, he began to rate the

fellow for a lazy, loitering, prying rascal; and having commanded him to remove the viands, he left the apartment, ostensibly to perform his duties in the fortress, but in reality to steal along the corridor to a narrow window which overlooked the *south terrace.*

CHAPTER II.

THE STATE PRISONER.

Duval, meanwhile, followed his conductor through a series of passages and gloomy apartments, into a narrow basement-floor, where Edwards paused to point out some low planks under a little staircase which they were about to ascend. Here, he said, were discovered the bones of Edward V. and the young Duke of York, murdered by their uncle Crookback. He added that the Lord Aumerle was lodged in the suite above, and that the building in which they stood was called the Bloody Tower, from the many sanguinary deeds which had been wrought in it.

Ascending the little staircase, Edwards unlocked an iron door, secured by many bolts and a massive chain, which admitted them to a small dark chamber scantily furnished, overlooking a courtyard below. There was another door opposite, slightly ajar, to which the old man crossed and knocked. No answer was returned, and motioning his companions to follow, he opened it and walked boldly in, observing that ceremonies were for courts not prisons. A somewhat unexpected sight, however, induced him to pause and sink his voice into a lower key.

The chamber in which they found themselves was large, but exceedingly gloomy, being lighted only by a high barred window, through which the evening sun fell slantingly, and threw all objects but those it touched into deep shadow. Beneath this light stood a desk on which were a silver crucifix, a massive candelabra, and writing materials scattered about. At the table, half concealed in a huge arm-chair, sat a stately form, his head supported on his hand, and apparently so lost in meditation, that he noticed neither the knock nor the entrance of his visiters. He was dressed in black velvet, trimmed with glittering jet ornaments, as if in

mourning; and a pointed hat, lying beside him on the desk, drooped heavily with plumes of the same funereal colour. His hair, which was grizzled over with premature old age, had once been glossy black, as his beard and mustaches still were. The light fell full upon his face, and revealed features peculiarly handsome, but marked by an expression of deep melancholy, and pale even to ghastliness. His eyes, which were stretched upwards, were of a fine intellectual blue, but though turned in earnest gaze on the iron bars, it seemed as if their sense was lost in thought. He had evidently been writing a paper which lay before him, for he still held the pen in his hand, and appeared to be ruminating on what he had written.

The apartment was furnished in the taste of the fifteenth century, with the massive chairs and immovable tables in which our ancestors delighted, and the walls were hung with curious tapestry, representing the fortunes of Esther. There was a door open communicating with another chamber, in which appeared a lofty bed hung with crimson damask richly embroidered. This chamber was lighted by a barred window, looking on huge bat-

tlements and roofs of houses sloping down to the river edge, which glittered beyond.

"My lord," said Edwards, "here is one of your servants, who I hope brings you news of better cheer than you are wont to hear."

The prisoner started from his thoughtful attitude; and in the first surprise, laid his hand where his sword should have been; but recollecting himself instantly, he smiled, and said, in a tone of satisfac-faction,

"Is it thou, old Talbot?—I am glad to see thee well, for, i'faith, thou art honester as the world goes than ninetenths of the unhanged. What say you? —who is so unmindful of himself as to remember me?"

"Your faithful servant, Claude Duval," exclaimed the traveller, throwing himself on his knee, and bursting into tears as he kissed the earl's hand extended to raise him.

"My good Duval!—you have let no grass grow under your horse's hoofs," said the prisoner eagerly "But where is my—where is the child?"

"This is little Mervyn, my lord," said Claude, stepping aside and disclosing the boy, who was

clinging to his cloak, and gazing round with visible terror.

"'Tis a lovely thing—I did never see Italian cherub that matched him in beauty!" said the earl, his marble complexion brightening with a deep glow. "Come hither, child—I will not harm thee."

"Go, Mervyn—what! art afraid of the noble gentleman?" said Claude, taking the reluctant hand of the child, who slunk back.

"No, I am not afraid of the gentleman—but what is that black thing on the table?" said the boy, pointing to the earl's hat.

"Tut, it is gone," said Aumerle, throwing it aside. "Give me thy hand, Mervyn—tell me, didst ever see me ere now?"

"Yes—once, when I was a naughty boy, and dreamed a wicked dream, nurse said," replied the boy.

"Faith, he remembers your lordship's secret visit in Cornwall, when you saw him by torchlight, as he slept in his crib," said Claude.

"Yes, and you kissed me, and your lips were so hot—like fire," continued the child, nevertheless, putting his hand in the earl's. "But I am not afraid

of you, because nurse said, you loved me, although you hated me."

"She told thee truly, child, albeit so quaintly," said the prisoner, putting back the boy's fair hair, and gazing at him with deep and sorrowful earnestness, "Look here, Duval!—see you these sparkling eyes and perfect mouth? These be the gifts of his beautiful bad mother; God grant he match her not in wickedness as in beauty!"

"Amen, my lord!" echoed Claude. "But I did just leave the lieutenant and his company marvelling at his close resemblance to your lordship. In truth, my dearest master—not to quarrel with your opinions on the matter—he is as like you as ever son to father;—but for all that, I say not that he is your son."

"Duval," said the earl, with much apparent agitation, "in truth, mine own opinions have undergone a strange revolution. Good Master Edwards, have you perchance licence to leave us some brief moments alone?"

"An hour, my lord," replied the old man, colouring, and starting from the attitude of extreme curiosity in which he was listening.

"For so much then we excuse your kind attendance, old Talbot," said the earl, gently; and the keeper of the regalia vanished, with some appearance of confusion.

"The old man hath his faults, like all human excellence," said Aumerle, smiling placidly after his jailer; "among the rest, unbounded curiosity and credulity, which are usual companions; but he hath served me, and his son is to render me some good for much which I did him formerly."

"But, my lord," said Duval, anxiously, "methought you spoke of some alteration in your opinions concerning your—the boy."

"Else deem you I should be seized with this dread for his safety?" said the earl. "If I still believed the—the tale—what should I fear for his life from that devilish pair? Claude, I have learned that which—thou knowest how my poor broken heart did ever cling, even when most deceived by those hideous forgeries, to that strong instinct which taught me that every drop in his sweet veins flowed from this heart, which even in its wildest madness, doted on him. Yet, who could have thought such unnatural perfidy could be in woman? that a human mother could rage more cruelly against her

offspring than a famished she-wolf? 'Tis horrible but to dream such horrors—yet they are! Heaven forgive me the injury my infatuated credulity has already done thee, my blessed child!"

And with tears gushing in quick drops from his eyes, Aumerle clasped the boy in his arms, and passionately kissed him—an operation to which he submitted in silent wonder.

"Our Lady be praised for this!" said Claude, brushing the dew from his own lids, which sprang in spite of his efforts. "Yet, by her sweet name! if ever I doubted that Master Mervyn was yours, every inch of him, may I lack her aid when I need it most!"

"Thou didst ever reason with my madness as with a stormy sea," said the prisoner, more calmly. "But for that, and much more, Claude, if I live, I will prove a grateful debtor."

The earl continued silent for some minutes, gazing intently at the child. "Duval," he said at length, with a sigh, "but for one little grain of doubt, how nectarous were this cup of joy! to feel the assurance that my ancestors' glories would yet survive in this beautiful and noble form when mine is laid for ever low!—But at present I have no time for tears,

albeit of joy. Claude, I think—I am sure I may confide in thee?"

"To the last drop of my blood, dearest master!"

"Well then, I will tell thee," said the prisoner, glancing cautiously around. "My life is in great jeopardy—indeed I am well persuaded I shall never leave these walls alive, not even to play a part on Traitors' Green; but if my son were safe, death has no terrors for me. I fear Duval—I fear—nay, I know, that neither his mother nor her paramour would hesitate to shed even his blood, if they thought it necessary to secure their inheritance from me."

"But is it possible, my lord, they can carry their wickedness to such damnable excess as to bring you to the block on a charge of which they know your innocence?"

"I know not, Duval! They have good witnesses—men accustomed to sell the blood of innocence. The king loves me not—the populace hate the mere sound of my name. Did not Dr. Tongue preach against me in St. Mary's on the Armada day, calling me the bloodthirsty papist, who only wanted power to be the Haman of this generation of Israel? And Claude," continued the prisoner, turning still paler,

"know you not that the chief perjurer against me is that murderous villain, Colonel Blood? He hates and fears me too much to leave his work half done!"

"He was well named the Irish Judas!" exclaimed Claude. "But, my lord, give not way to such gloomy forebodings—"

"Tut, Duval, 'tis not for myself I fear," said the earl, hastily. "Life hath but few temptations left for me; my sun hath gone down at noonday, and left all darkness. I say not that I desire to die, for I would fain live to restore my son to his rank and name: but if that may not be—But again I will not indulge in these sad thoughts. Why, as thou sayest, all may yet be well; the king hath acceded to my earnest prayer, and grants me an audience to-morrow in this dungeon of mine, unless my enemies should meantime learn the secret and baffle me; which I fear not, for it is confided to one man only, my dearest friend, whose importunities wrung this from the king. You have heard me speak of Colonel Sydney—alas! and he departed this morn to Denmark!"

"But, my lord, what good do you anticipate from—"

"Listen, Claude," interrupted the earl, drawing

a paper from his doublet, his eyes flashing suddenly with excitement. "I hold here a document which will go far to clear me in his royal eyes, and will restore my son to all his rights. Careless as he is, the king loves no injustice which he commits not himself. If I live, this shall be done, if not, my son will survive to avenge me."

"But, my dear lord, surely there is no reason to apprehend personal violence?" said Claude, shuddering.

"You little know what sort of hounds are on my track," replied the prisoner, with an anxious glance around the chamber. "My enemies have committed themselves too deeply, and, like murderers after the first blow is struck, they *dare* not let me live. Who knows what secrets this tapestry veils? Troth, Duval, these walls could tell many a fearful tale, if they had tongues to speak. I have sounded them about, and they give many a hollow answer. But no matter. If they come not upon me in my sleep, they shall not find it woman's work! My good Claude, it is not their policy to have me die a traitor's death, for then the rich inheritance they hope to possess, would be all forfeit to the crown; yet wherefore they have involved me in this Irish con-

spiracy, and bribed Blood to include me in the general accusation, puzzles my judgment."

"Mayhap they depend on their favour with the king to bar the confiscation," said Duval, anxious to dissipate the still more fearful alternative.

"It may be so; and the belief comforts me," said the prisoner, calmly. "And now listen to me with attention, Duval, for what I say must be registered clearly in your memory. Doubtless you were surprised at the hot haste with which I sent you to bring this child from Wales to visit me in my durance—I, unto whom his very presence once infused horror, though loving him dearer than mine eyes;—in this resembling the poor dog-bitten wretch who thirsts unto death, yet agonizes at the sight of water. Listen then to the contents of this paper, which I may well call my salvation, though thou wilt marvel when I tell thee 'tis a letter from my wife, brought at her command by no more welcome messenger than Blood himself; and this I mean to show to the king, and none shall deprive me of it but with my life."

The earl continued opening a paper as he spoke, and little Mervyn, who had now got over his panic, sat on his knee as he read it, playing with a jewelled

miniature which hung on his breast. Excited as he evidently was, Aumerle read in a deep stifled undertone, as if he feared that its contents might reach some listener, though there seemed little cause for apprehension, as they had heard Talbot bolting three doors after him as he retired. The contents ran thus, slightly broken by the earl's comments.

"My Lord Aumerle! (for it is thus, Claude, that my affectionate and faithful wife addresses her imprisoned husband)—my Lord Aumerle!

"It is with extreme pain, and much doubt of my own judgment, that I write to you once more, and for the last time: but I am overruled by those who have a right to exact this complaisance from me. (Ha, truly! the villain, Howard,—or honest master Blood?) I write not, my lord, to deny that, in the world's eye, you are a deeply wronged man, and I your wronger; how far with justice so judged, your own heart better knows—you, who, aided by a father whose cruelty I dare no longer accuse to that tribunal before which he has appeared, tore me from the arms of the only man I ever loved, to fill a loathed place in yours. Neither do I write to insult your misfortunes in this that I,

so injured by you, am now the arbitrix of your fate almost as certainly as fate herself— and you know if you have deserved much moderation from me. I do indeed most solemnly avow before God, and would before men, but that other considerations pluck me back, that I did ever hate you, and shall to my dying day and hour. Why would you still hold a woman in your chains who abhors the mere sound of your name? But in truth I write to resume the proposal which I made you oft before, as well as on Monday se'nnight, by my friend, Colonel Blood. And these terms I offer you again, very earnestly praying you to regard your life and honour better than to reject them.

"You know well (not to speak indiscreetly) that it is in my power either to withdraw the charge on which you are a doleful prisoner, or to press it on to its bloodiest consequence. You know with what passion my Lord Howard and I desire to remove all blame from our life by a public marriage, that our child may not be born also with reason to curse your obstinacy; and this may not be without the church's divorce between us two, which hath long been in heart and person. You know, too, that my Lord Howard is not rich, and I would not bring

him beggary as well as so much trouble; therefore, I made those terms which, methinks, are as fair and equitable as reason can devise. You are not now to learn that I am heir to your title and rich earldom, if you leave no lawful issue, which you will not—if you force me to confirm by public declaration what I have already affirmed concerning the child Reginald. I am now, however, willing to confess that he is your lawful son and heir, (as Heaven witness, so he is!) and to suffer his inheritance, albeit I love him not, (which is a fair proof, he is none of my Lord Howard's, as I feigned, to madden you, and avenge me,) on conditions which I hereinafter name.

"Firstly: that you join with me to obtain a divorce, on grounds of disagreement in religion, and the compulsion used against me, which, as is just, you must avow.

"Secondly: that you settle half the rental of your estates upon me during your lifetime, and the manor of Mervyn in perpetual; also, that you charge your son's succession with an annual payment (in case I survive you) of five thousand moidores in gold, Paris weight, which is only an addition of one

thousand livres on the jointure settled on me at our marriage.

"These terms being satisfactorily complied with, I will withdraw, annul, and disavow, if you will so, in legal form, all that I have done and said tending to the opinion of your son's illegitimacy, and I will publicly acknowledge him the true and lawful heir to your estate, blood, and dignity.

"Otherwise, though it were to cover myself with ignominy to the day of doom itself, I will proclaim you a dishonoured wretch, and your son a bastard, before the peers of England, and demand the inheritance which (from your sickly aspect) methinks I shall not wait for long, unless you are soon let out of your donjon to the free air.

"These from the injured woman whose greatest sorrow is, that she is obliged to sign herself, your lordship's wife,

"ELEANOR AUMERLE."

"Duval," said the earl, gaspingly, as he concluded, "now tell me, in good faith, what think you of this lady?"

"In good faith, then, my lord," replied Claude,

"your lady hath even as black a soul as she hath fair body, and methinks that rivals the angels. But what answer sent you?"

"Canst ask, Claude?" said the prisoner, sharply. "What answer but that which I returned to all former threats and persuasions, and which shall be my latest word whether on the scaffold, or torn to pieces by the mad populace, or struggling beneath the murderer's knife—never, never! They shall have my heart ere they have the word they seek!"

"But, my lord, surely there is some wondrous cause for so black a hate?" said Duval, soothingly.

"She never loved me, man," replied the earl, gloomily; "her heart was fixed on this villain, Howard, but seduced by the knavish folly of her father, and that fatal dower of beauty which was all she had—I forced him at the sword's point to resign his pretensions, and wedded her, I must needs own, against her will—but then I knew it not!"

The unhappy prisoner paused abruptly, and Claude, not knowing what to say, stood playing with his plume for several minutes.

"But are you well assured, my lord," he said at last, not so much weighing what he said as anxious to say something, "that Colonel Sydney will not betray your counsel? I have heard he is a near friend and intimate of Lord Howard's?"

"'Tis true, but his very soul is honour—I will not doubt my friend!" said the earl, "much as he loves that rogue, he hath taken my part throughout this affair. Was he not my second when I challenged Howard, and my wife, disguised as a page, held his horse while he fought with me? Ah! had we not been parted by the meddling watch, I had indeed glutted my revenge, and hacked him to pieces before her eyes!"

"The time may yet come, my lord!" exclaimed Duval.

"But if I should perish in the mean time," said the earl, with a ghastly smile, "if you should hear that I, the melancholy catholic earl, have committed suicide in the Tower, do thou call it in thy prayers, Claude, *murder!* In that case, thou wilt know that mine enemies have thrown the gauntlet to fate, and it will be in vain to urge my son's claims—they will sink with my blood into the earth. I charge thee, expose not his life to dan-

ger by any attempt of the sort; the time will come. Keep his hiding-place a secret from the world, and his birth from himself, till he is able to withstand their machinations. Times will alter; and surely now they are at the worst. These tempests will purify the plague-tainted atmosphere of men's opinions, and a sunshine follow which will give the lilies of justice light to bloom."

"But will not silence confirm their possession till too late to be disputed?" said Duval.

"And what proofs could be adduced against it?" said Aumerle, sadly. "This letter?—they will call it a forgery! Oh, what madness was it that blinded me so that I perceived not her purpose when she rung my consent to a public declaration of the child's death, threatening else to expose all! and I—oh, fool! oh, wretch! led by a mad credulity —well, no more! I may live to repair my pretty Mervyn's wrongs."

And he smoothened back the child's fair ringlets with a look of unutterable love and sorrow.

"You will live, my lord—we shall all live—to hear Mervyn Castle ring with the festival which shall celebrate your heir's restoration!" said Duval.

"Well, well, I am willing to look on the sunny

side of things," said Aumerle, with a melancholy smile. "But—thou knowest I am not held a coward—but I did never see that man, Blood, without a chill of horror—not fear. I feel as if my evil genius were then in presence—but these perchance are but sickly fancies of a troubled soul—let them pass. Duval, I intend that you sail tomorrow for Calais, and I have devised a plan by which to elude the Dutch and French cruisers as well as our own. Old Edwards hath a son—a noted smuggler—but at present carrying letters of marque against the French. He commands a little schooner in the river, but having acquaintance and understanding with the whole coast of France, he will be able to land you at Calais, and for a sum of gold hath agreed so to do. Once there, your letters to the Provincial are a sufficient passport."

"'Tis a marvellously well-seeming plan, my lord," said Claude, filling up his master's pause.

"The vessel is lying at Woolwich," continued the earl, "but the crew are principally in London, at a house on the bridge, kept by an old servant of my family—you remember her, Temperance Bradley? The inn is called, if I mistake not, the Aumerle Arms; and Captain Edwards is there, who

will take charge of your safety until to-morrow, when you will sail, weather allowing. Spare not till you have placed my son in safety at Saint Omer, and on the instant return with your good news. If you find me alive, you shall not find me ungrateful."

"Oh, my dear lord, do not yield to such sad thoughts."

"I cannot help them, Claude!—They come over me like the gloom before the storm—I know not whence nor how. But I do hope much from my interview with the king to-morrow."

The earl now unlocked the desk before him, and opening a secret drawer secured with a spring, took out a letter sealed with his arms, and directed to the Father Provincial, De Oliva, at the Jesuits' college at Saint Omer, and with it a canvass bag also sealed.

"Here are a hundred gold doubloons, Claude, to bear your charges," he continued. "This letter is to my good friend and early tutor, De Oliva, who is now at the college on his visitation; present with it this bill on my Paris banker, for, though I know the good fathers need no bribe to do me a service, my son shall owe nothing to charity. I also commission you to place in the padre's custody my

jewels and insignia of the garter, which he may preserve as means to identify my son at a future day."

Opening a gold casket, the earl took out the jewelled chain and dragon of the royal order. Attracted by the fiery sparkle of the jewels, little Mervyn made a bold clutch at them, and the earl, amused by his eagerness, threw the collar over him, and it hung glittering almost to his feet. The exceeding beauty of the child, and the joy which lightened over his face, struck the earl with a mingled passion of sorrow and delight, and throwing himself back in his chair he hid his face and wept.

Mervyn seemed suddenly to suspect that it was he who caused this burst of grief, and exclaiming,

"Don't cry, sir—I will not take them away—I will not," leaped into his father's arms, and kissed him with childish efforts at consolation.

At this moment the clang of a door was heard, and Edwards's voice in angry expostulation. A deep rough voice replied, in a louder key,

"I tell thee, my Cerberus of jewels, and jewel of Cerberuses, I must and will see this caged earl of yours. Here is my warrant from a hand which Master Lieutenant hath allowed, cap in hand.

Prithee, unbar the den, and let us into this cat-a-mountain—he is too well tamed to tear a body to pieces."

Edwards seemed to mutter something in reply, and began unfastening the massive door, after knocking to signify his intention.

"It is Blood!" said the earl, turning ashy pale; and almost as Claude, who, despite his own strong nerves, was considerably startled, turned towards the door, it was pushed rudely open, and a man stepped into the apartment, followed by Edwards. So peculiar was the whole appearance of this bold visiter, that even little Mervyn, screaming lustily, crouched down and hid his face in his father's mantle.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL BLOOD.

"PARDON, my lord, this somewhat abrupt entrance into your honourable presence," was the new visiter's address, delivered with a bold scrutinizing glance on all present, and concluding with one of threatening inquiry at the earl.

"Colonel Blood's presence always brings its own excuse—apparently," replied the earl, with a deep flush. "But methinks 'tis somewhat surperfluous courtesy to ask a prisoner's pardon for entering his dungeon, sithence he hath neither means nor right to resist such authorized intrusion."

"I shall not trouble your lordship long; but, for

the brief space which I needs must, I will anticipate *your* courtesy so far as to seat myself," said the colonel, throwing himself with perfect nonchalance into a chair, and kicking a stool towards him, on which he leisurely crossed his legs.

Claude felt his first emotion of alarm and curiosity at the appearance of a man so renowned for almost every species of daring villany, rapidly changing into indignation at his insolence, but he was obliged to suppress all exterior signs, and to content himself with returning the colonel's deliberate inspection.

He beheld a figure remarkable at first glance for its prodigious strength and muscular symmetry, the bull-like massiveness of the neck and shoulders, and the somewhat peculiar largeness of the head. His face, however, was what chiefly caught the eye, and fixed it in indistinct fear and suspicion. The features, considered without their expression, though perfectly Irish in their conformation, were not unhandsome ; the lips though thin and too wide, had a determined curve, and the forehead although low, with its massive overhanging eyebrows, gave the idea of a rude power and energy of intellect, able to second, but too well, the volitions of a coarse and sensual nature. Thick curls of close jet black hair

clustered round his head, his beard and mustaches were, if possible, of a still more raven dye, and grew about his lips and face in short curly bristles, which gave him a wild-boar fierceness of aspect. But it was the expression of these features, the bloodhound glitter of his large brown eyes which, in spite of the bold plausibility of his manners, excited alarm and disgust in all who beheld him.

Never was there a truer index of character than this man's visage. Courage, perfidy, a remorseless energy of purpose and execution, were as plainly visible in the workings of his eye as in the acts of that strange and sanguinary career which has stamped Blood the most remarkable villain of an age abounding in such.

He was dressed in the usual splendid style of the period, but with something sinister and uncommon in his choice of colours. His doublet was of black silk, slashed with red, his mantle and hat of yellow velvet, profusely ornamented with flame-coloured ribbons. His stockings and rosettes were of different colours, a collar of crimson lace covered his breast, and a sword of formidable length knocked at his heels from a belt in which was also a single pistol, very richly mounted.

Having seated himself to his satisfaction, Blood amused himself for a minute of deep silence (during which the earl seemed hesitating whether to resent his insolent effrontery or not) by taking a keenly deliberate survey of little Mervyn, who looked at him with unfeigned terror. At last he observed, with a peculiar smile,

"The little gentleman and I seem to have a kind of mutual recollection of each other—may I ask your lordship to refresh my memory with his name?"

"Certainly, Mr. Blood," replied the earl, with forced composure. "But before I answer your question, allow me to ask what urgent business it is which compels you to break so unwelcomely on my privacy?"

"That will I in as brief space as you might crush a grasshopper," replied the visiter, carelessly drawing his pistol, as if it incommoded him. "But I doubt our audience, though few, is not fit."

"None fitter, sir; this gentleman is my most trusted and confidential servant. If what you say cannot be confided to honest ears, I care not to be of your audience."

"Honest! are your ears honest, friend?" said Blood, turning to Claude, with affected astonishment. "Marry then—look that you do not lose them in the pillory."

"Faith, sir, I do not think they run any risk in a country where your honour's are safe," replied Claude, sharply.

"'Sbodikins, man, but you answer glibly," said the visiter, measuring Claude from head to foot. "And, by St. Patrick's corns, a likely man of the sort! does your steel ring such jangling music as your tongue?"

"Will you try, sir?" said Duval, colouring and clapping his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Not on such poor cattle as thou art, friend," replied the colonel, with a laugh. "Your eagle will not be crammed with oatmeal like a jackdaw, and my prey is not poor serving-men and insolent varlets, but princes, dukes, and nobles of ancient blood."

"Peace, Claude!" interrupted the earl, authoritatively. "And for you, sir, either explain your purpose, or rid me of a presence which I freely confess is the most displeasant to me of any on this side

death. We are not now to learn of what great felonies and high-soaring villanies Colonel Blood is capable."

"My lord," replied the colonel, with a complacent smile at this last observation. "To pass over an eloquent preamble I had prepared to usher in this last trial I shall ever make of your patience; have you maturely weighed the determination in which I had the trouble to leave you, and are you still resolved to sacrifice life and honour to a vain scruple? Pronounce the word: I am on my way to the council, either to confirm or cancel my depositions against you?"

"The justice of England is not yet so deeply polluted in its streams as at its source, that I should fear your threats," said the earl, calmly. "I dare not think so meanly of any twelve of my countrymen as to deem that, prejudiced as they are, they will condemn an English nobleman to the block on the unsupported testimony of a man so notorious for his indifference to all ties, divine or human, as Mr. Blood."

"For all that I have done in the way of tiffs with old mother law, I have the king's pardon in my pocket," replied the colonel. "And as for the jus-

tice of any twelve men in England, it is worth precisely what the highest bidder will give; and your lordship knows if, in your present sequestered state, you are likely to carry the auction. Once more then, I beseech you to consider your resolution—for the last time."

"It is considered, for the last time—hear it!" said Aumerle, with the quivering calm of concentrated passion. "You are come in good time, Mr. Blood, to witness in common with my servant, Duval, what I now declare, and call Heaven to witness, is the determination in which I will live and die. This child on whom your eye dwells with such pertinacity, though educated as the offspring of a poor Cornish woman, I hereby acknowledge to be my lawful son and sole heir, Reginald, Lord Mervyn. And as such I leave him the inheritance of his ancestors; sooner than part with one inch of which to that woman and her paramour, I will die as many deaths as the utmost rage of my enemies could inflict! And thereto I call you, Colonel Blood, to bear testimony, as I doubt not my faithful Duval will, when the time comes."

"With my heart's last drop!" exclaimed Claude.

"Say you so, master lackey?" said Blood, with a

glance of speechless contempt. "So then this burst of madness is your lordship's sober resolution? You refuse to yield a little, and so force those who hav the power to take all?"

"I defy both them and you!" exclaimed the earl, rising with much agitation. "Begone, and do your worst! There is One above will avenge me! Yea, I am certain as that I now breathe and speak, and may soon cease to do either, that even in the small arm of this child lives a might which shall some day avenge his father's wrongs—ay, beyond even his father's prayers!"

"But of what use is passion, my lord?" returned Blood, amusing himself with snapping in-and-out a spring dagger concealed in the pistol. "In truth, if the boy calls you father, 'tis a flattering compliment, for he is of a marvellously perfect cut. Marry, how his eyes sparkle to see this sharp toy of mine leap in and out. I warrant me now, young sir, thou wouldst give me a grape or two to play at this? Come hither, child."

And rudely clutching the boy's arm in spite of his shrieks, he drew him forward, and with such violence that happening to stumble over the stool, he fell, and hit his forehead against the hilt of the

colonel's sword. A red stream instantly gushed from his brow, and almost simultaneously Blood measured his length on the floor, struck down by a vigorous blow from the earl.

To spring again on his feet, and rush towards Aumerle with his dagger raised, was but an instant's work, and the consequences must have been fatal, as the earl, though unarmed, awaited him without flinching, had not Claude darted between, and dexterously clutching Blood by the wrist, wrenched away his weapon, and threw it to the other end of the apartment. The latter, like a tiger baffled of his prey, turned with additional fury on his new assailant, and a struggle commenced, the issue of which was very doubtful ; but luckily, the noise brought assistance, just as the earl was rushing to part the combatants. Edwards and a warder ran in, and succeeded with some difficulty, in separating the enraged belligerents.

Meanwhile the earl seemed utterly heedless of the brawl, raising the senseless child in his arms, and calling for help in a tone of distraction. Edwards and Duval came to his assistance, and Blood himself, perceiving the impossibility of further aggression, sullenly desired the warder to give

what assistance he could. Then reseating himself, he quietly stanched the gore which flowed from his own nostrils and brow, glancing from time to time at the opposite group.

An old woman, whom Edwards summoned, now arrived, and applied vinegar and some strong waters to the child's temples. At last he revived, but only to burst into a long fit of sobbing and crying, during which the earl soothed, caressed, and kissed him with the passionate tenderness of a young mother.

It was soon found that the child had sustained only a trifling injury, and he grew more composed, when his terrors were renewed by the appearance of his enemy, who came forward with a face much disfigured by blood, and a purple bruise on his temples. Aumerle looked at him with a stern and doubtful eye, though without expecting any further attack.

"Be not afraid, Lord Aumerle," said Blood, with a loud and scornful laugh. "I do not intend to hurt your lordship; the whole affair is one of damnable folly, which for my part I am willing to forget and forgive."

"Blood, I know you will neither forgive nor

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forget," replied Aumerle. "I do not desire that you should. I know what to conclude from this seeming moderation; but remember, it was your own insolence which provoked me to this act, which, however, I do most heartily rejoice and exult in. Now go, whither you are bound. Mr. Edwards, I desire you to show Colonel Blood out of my apartment, and never, under whatever pretext, admit him again."

"Goodness me! but your head is sadly bruised, sir," said Mrs. Edwards, raising her vinegar bottle. "Let me dress it, for a blue bruise is ten times easier to mend than a green. Good lack do, sir."

"My lord," said Blood, without perhaps hearing this invitation in the absorption of passion. "I do not intend to trouble you with my presence again; but as I would not part in hatred from one whom it needs no stretch of fancy to call a *dying man*, I bid your lordship very cordially farewell. You have struck me, Earl Aumerle," he concluded, turning deadly white, and smiling with inexpressible malice. "You have struck me—and I have not returned the blow—look that your prayers be said when I do!"

And without waiting a reply, he strode to the

door, stooped apparently to pick up his pistol, and left the room with a slam which made even its massive walls shake, and sent the dust from the tapestry in a cloud.

The effect of this furious speech on the earl, was instantaneous and strangely deep. He paced up and down in a state of extreme agitation, his brow bathed in damp dews. At last he paused abruptly, and telling Edwards that he needed only five minutes longer privacy, requested him to retire with the warder and his wife into the antechamber.

"I did abase myself to strike so inordinate a villain," said Aumerle, when they were gone. "Yet am I glad there was no mortal weapon in my reach, else had I sent him, black with unnumbered sins before Him whose every law he has broken. And yet, Claude, my blood thickens when I recall his deadly smile, I did ever shrink even from his blandishments, when he seemed most my friend, and by his devilish artifices induced me to sign the Catholic petition, whose delivery it seems was the signal of revolt in Dublin.—If ever you should hear that I have committed suicide, Claude, be sure *it will be by that hand.*"

The earl paused and glanced gloomily around the

wide and dreary chamber, which was thrown into masses of shadow by the faint rays of moonlight streaming in at the iron bars. Claude could only perceive the deadly paleness of his master's features, but he observed him start, and point towards a part of the tapestry which either stirred, or to Claude's alarmed eye, seemed to stir. He replied to the tacit question, however, with a poor attempt at a laugh, and an assurance that it was only the wind.

"It may be so," said Aumerle, after a moment's pause. "My spirits are utterly disturbed and off their hinges. My very senses are the fools of my imagination, my heart palpitates, and my hair bristles with horror if a plank creaks, or a swallow twitters on the battlements above. Yet was it not I who carried off the only flag lost by Cromwell's army at Worcester?—No more of these follies!—Claude, I shall not rest until you are safely lodged at Bradley's; I know them honest. Here—aid me while I seal these papers."

He produced a small flint and steel from his escritoire as he spoke, and lighted a taper which Claude held while he sealed the letter and jewels in a parcel. During this operation he continued pressing on Duval the importance of expedition, and made him

promise that he would not sleep above one night in France, till he returned with his intelligence.

Mervyn was however unwilling to part with his glittering toy, and showed indubitable signs of anger when the earl took it from his neck.

"Thou shalt have it again, my child," he said, kissing his wounded brow. "Who knows, Duval? Perchance he may wear it some day with honour among the peers of England, when his unfortunate father's very form has mouldered into shapeless dust! Teach him, Claude, when he is older, how I loved him—dearest when least I seemed to do so!—Tell him how his mother wronged me, and then he will forgive me—perhaps shed some bitter tears over my grave. And now, though your loyal heart needs no oath to bind it, swear to me, Duval, swear eternal fidelity and secrecy, if not to me, to my child!"

The earl extended the little crucifix before him on the table, and Claude dropping on his knees, kissed the holy symbol in confirmation of his pledge. He then, at his master's suggestion, ripped a seam in his mantle, and sewed the paper and jewels in it, together with half the gold intended for his journey.

The moment of parting had now arrived. Ed-

wards opened the door to announce that Master Lieutenant's officer was waiting to receive the keys of the wards. Aumerle clasped his young child tenderly in his arms, and repeatedly kissed the still bloody wound on his brow.

"God have mercy on me!" he murmured in a deep under tone. "But this is the first time I did ever embrace this beautiful infant as my son, and my soul bodes it is the last."

Little Mervyn began to cry, and clinging to the earl's neck, said that he would not leave him—and asked Claude if he might not stay and live with the gentleman, if he was a good boy.

"My sweet Reginald," said the unhappy prisoner in a broken voice. "Heaven forbid that I should chain your bright young destinies to mine, which are setting in such darkness. Go with Claude, my child—but be, as you say, good, and we *shall* meet again."

The earl, unable to speak further, motioned to Claude, who fastened his mantle carefully, and bent to kiss his master's extended hand, but the latter wrung his with extreme emotion, and uttering only, "My faithful Duval!" took Mervyn's hand and led him to the door.

Edwards and the warder of the keys were waiting in the antechamber, and the latter muttered some observation on the earl's quitting the chamber—but broke off involuntarily, struck by the anguish in his countenance. Aumerle advanced a few steps, proudly striving to conquer his emotion, but a few convulsive sobs burst from him.

"Bid your father farewell, child—your father!" said Duval, anxious to put an end to the miserable scene.

"My father, Claude?" said Mervyn, with an innocent look of wonder, "I thought I had no father! Good-by, papa."

"Farewell, my son!—Heaven and thy father's blessing be upon thee for ever!" exclaimed Aumerle, once more clutching the child to his breast, and kissing it with a gush of tears. Then, as if ashamed of his emotion, he set the boy down, and desired Edwards to let them out at the gate below.

Duval pressed his master's hand on his heart, lifted Mervyn in his arms, and followed the old man. In a moment they disappeared down the dark staircase, and the earl returned to his prison.

CHAPTER IV.

NELL GWYN'S APPRENTICESHIP.

Claude, on finding himself emancipated from the gloomy shadows of the Tower, which seemed to him darker than those of any other building he had ever seen, regained his natural cheerfulness. Not so little Mervyn, although the night was very fine, and brilliant with starlight. Without well knowing why, the child was frightened and melancholy, starting at every shadow of the projecting houses, and anxiously inquiring when they should have light. Claude carried him still, and sang as he went, rather to amuse the child than from any gaiety of feeling, though his heart was of that elastic sort which leaps up the moment the pressure is past. He seemed to be well acquainted with the part he was traversing,

passing through numberless narrow, crooked, and dark streets, until they emerged suddenly on the shore of the river.

London Bridge—*old* London Bridge, crowded with ill-built houses, which sometimes crossed the road on arches—was before him resting on its innumerable arches, the river flowing placidly beneath. A high battlemented gate defended the entrance, flanked by towers of solid masonry, and furnished with a portcullis and spiked gate of massive timber. The portcullis was already down, but a small wicket, in the right tower, was open for the convenience of passengers, who, after passing the scrutiny of the watch, entered a dark passage which opened on the bridge.

Inquiring for the Aumerle Arms, Claude learned that it was kept in one of the towers, a fact which he had conjectured from an emblazoned shield hung over the portcullis, and a bush of birch hanging beneath a lamp. There was also an inscription in huge letters over the arms which promised well for the kind of cheer to be met within.

Lodgings and Entertainment for Man and Beast.
Good Beef—good Hay—
Welcome to go—Welcome to stay—
Much to have—and Little to pay.

Into this hostel Claude made his way, entering a small courtyard, surrounded by a wooden gallery, which communicated with all the chambers above; and inquired for mine host of some carriers who were drinking and feeding their horses. "Do you want the master or the landlord, companion?" replied one, deliberately taking the pipe from his mouth, and whiffing the smoke in Claude's face.

"Why, the master to be sure," replied Duval.

"Oh, then—*she's* yonder," said the fellow with a laugh, which was echoed all round. "Don't ye see her? Yon 'oomun amucking in the stable; she's been to see the 'orses rubbed down. Ho! mistress, ye're awanted."

A short fat puncheon of a woman, with a face as broad as a full moon, and crimson with exertion, emerged at this call from a stable at hand, holding a pitchfork which still bore tokens of recent employment. She was attended by a nymph whose appearance certified the nature of the office she held in the establishment. She was a tall, full, well-turned figure, though characterized by an air of habitual laziness and inattention. Her face was fat, fair, and finely-featured, with a rich hazel eye full of wanton moistness, and a sort of voluptuous

indolence which was not without attraction. She seemed good-humoured from the smile on her pouting lips, but on the whole there was an air of dormant wickedness and craft spread over her countenance which seemed only to want opportunity to develop itself in deeds. She was dressed in a blue petticoat and coarse brown bodice, with a straw hat crushed shapelessly upon her head, and tied by a piece of tattered riband. Her occupation had evidently been holding a lamp, while her more vigorous mistress prepared the stables for the night, and as she threw its gleam over Mrs. Bradley's thick shoulders to look at Claude, it was clear the wench smiled with no unfavourable sentiments.

"Well, sir, and wot do you want?" was the hostess's courteous query, as she stood puffing and panting, and wiping her face with the back of her hand, the palm being deeply tainted with odoriferous matter.

"Why, Mistress Temperance, how's this? Have you forgotten your old friend and admirer, Claude Duval?" said the cavalier, and presuming on the licence of old friendship, he invaded Mrs. Bradley's plump cheeks with a chaste salute.

"Lawk love you, Mounseer Duval! Save us!

the same man every inch of him!" exclaimed the hostess, smiling from ear to ear, and extending her fat red hand, she buried Duval's in its grasp, wringing it very heartily. "Well, I'm sure! and if you ar'n't as welcome as the flowers of May, call me no honest woman, and my house no better than the Old Swan opposite. And so, Mr. Duval, ye're married at last, and have a family, I see—after all your talkings against mattermony, and what not?"

"Ay, ay, dame; after you disappointed me, I took up with the first that came to hand," replied Claude, with a wink at the grinning maid. "Not that I am exactly married—no man that ever loved you could so far forget what he had lost. But the boy is mine, and nothing to be ashamed of either."

"You are not my father, Claude," said Mervyn, pettishly. "Papa wears velvet and a gold chain—you are not papa!"

"Faith, mounseer, the urchin savoreth something too much of my lord's look," said Mrs. Temperance, with an acute nod at Claude. "Well, well, I can see my way in a fog as well as most people. But, good lack! to think how my poor master and lord, that was so main kind to us all, is himself comed now to trouble! Oh, the devils!—it would make a

stone sob to hear how he's a-served out by the willainousest wretches wot ever was!"

And Mrs. Bradley burst into a cataract of tears, to the infinite amusement of her attendant, who stretched out her grinning face to an inimitably rueful expression, which almost forced Duval to laugh.

"Ay, Mrs. Temperance! he was a good master to us all,—and methinks he hath set you up here handsomely as your deservings,—which is saying a wide word," replied he.

"Why, the place is well enough, and a lucky penny it's been to me, the fifty gold crowns my lord tossed me on my bride day, if I had not married the laziest, good-for-nothingest, drunkenest little scoundrel as ever drew God's air in thanklessness!" groaned Mrs. Bradley. "But howsomedever, Master Duval, you're entire welcome yourself to the best in my house, for, be praised! it is mine, and shall be mine to my dying day, as right it should be, seeing the yellows were all mine: for (would you believe it, Mounseer Duval?) the little villain hadn't a ha'penny saved after all his talk and long service with my lord, who, I'm sure, was not a

master to grudge his folks their little pickings!—And butler too!—it makes me sick, sorry, and sad when I think of what a fool I was to be wheedled by a little, drunken—"

"But where is Mr. Bradley now?" interrupted Claude.

"Where is he always?" said the hostess, throwing the pitchfork against the wall. "Why, even just getting as drunk as a sow with that dare-devil rake-hell of a captain, young Edwards, and all his crew of buccaneers about him. But that isn't what I find fault with—that may be all for the good of the house—but—"

"The very man I want to see," continued Claude, "and that is my business here, Mrs. Bradley, next to seeing your own handsome face. I am going to take my boy to Normandy to live with my relations there, and Captain Edwards is to take me. Can I see him?"

"Here—Moll Creswold!—where's the jade?" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, turning sharply round.

"I'se here, missus," replied the damsel, colouring with fear lest the sudden turn had revealed her occupation of making faces at her mistress.

"Show the gemman up stairs, to No. 3, among the sailors," said Mrs. Temperance. "Tell 'em he wants Captain Edwards."

"I will hunt him up, myself, dear Mrs. Bradley," replied Claude, hastily. "But I hope you will give us your company at supper over a pottle of sack, to talk of old times. Let us have a stewed chicken, Mrs. Bradley—you were famous at stewed chickens in my lord's time."

The hostess smiled at this flattering compliment, but as Moll Creswold had now obtained a link from one of the ostlers, the conversation was cut short for the present, and Claude followed his fair conductress up a flight of wooden steps to the gallery above. Here by a sudden gust of wind the torch was extinguished, and the girl, protesting she was afraid of ghosts, clutched hold of Claude's arm. But his usual gallantry deserted him on this occasion; he shook her somewhat rudely off, and groped his way along a narrow corridor in darkness. Moll, however, darted forward with great agility, and unceremoniously threw open a door before him.

A curious scene presented itself. It was a large awkwardly planned apartment, full of projecting cornices and recesses, and nearly half hanging like

a penthouse over the river. A vast sea-coal fire burned in a chimney of such dimensions, that it looked like a black anti-room; and around it, seated at wooden tables covered with beer-jugs, tobacco, arms of various forms, and coarse esculents, sat the most miscellaneous group which Claude in his wide experience had ever seen. Some dozen sailors were there, dressed in many varieties of marine costume, but all furnished abundantly with offensive weapons, such as pistols and hangers.

The captain of the band was easily distinguished by the tawdry splendour of his garb, and the general respect paid to him in a rough way. He was a large-boned, vigorous-looking man, about thirty, with a face bronzed by exposure and hardship, features extremely coarse, a clear, bold eye, and an expression of honest good-nature and kindness of heart which made his countenance on the whole very agreeable. He wore a blue coat, which seemed so richly bedizened, though much faded, that it raised suspicion of having belonged to some naval officer of high rank ere it passed into the present owner's possession, especially as his scarlet woollen cap and coarse white trousers were by no means of a corresponding character. He had a steel belt

stuck with pistols, and a very handsome hanger, somewhat ostentatiously decorated with ribands.

But there was another object which more particularly attracted Claude's observation. Seated on the captain's knee, with one slender arm round his burly neck, sat a young and beautiful girl—beautiful in spite of rags and the few articles of tawdry finery which she had contrived to decorate herself withal. She seemed scarcely sixteen years old; her figure was light and very graceful, though somewhat low, and her face might have served a painter as a model for Hebe, so fair, fresh, and sparkling with gaiety and good-humour was its every line. Her dress was of the most tattered and poverty-stricken description, but even her rags were arranged with intuitive grace. She wore a short yellow petticoat, patched with all the colours of the rainbow, and a bodice so ragged that the fine turn of her neck and its whiteness were but too visible. Clusters of natural ringlets of the purest gold, which she had twined with some flowers, shaded her fair face. A basket of oranges and a string of ballads beside her, seemed to denote the girl's occupation, and when Claude entered, she was singing some sea-ballad to suit the taste of her auditory, but with

so sweet and rich a voice, that a king's ear need not have disdained it.

Not far from this group sat a little man on a stool, with a large fat face, a nose of extraordinary dimensions, and small twinkling eyes, who seemed listening with maudlin tears of delight to the girl's song,—jogging himself and a brimful tankard of ale to keep time.

Claude's entrance obviously disturbed the good meeting. The song ceased, and the songstress made an effort to spring from the sailor's knee; but he pulled her back, with a rough "D—n it, Nell, what's the go now? art afeard, girl?"

"Not of me, I hope, sir," said Duval, with a flourish of his hat.

"No, nor o'th' devil himself when Jack Edwards is by, let alone a French jackanapes!" replied the captain, with a fierce survey of Duval's person and accoutrements.

"Faith, Jack, the gentleman is not a man to frighten one," said Nell, for such was her name.

"I am able to take mine own part, pretty damsel, yet I thank you," said Duval. "But Captain Edwards mistakes me; my business is with him: you perhaps know this signal."

He whispered a word in Edwards's ear, which seemed to produce a great effect; and exclaiming, "Lord love you! so, you're come at last! welcome as Torbay in a gale!" he sprang up and shook Claude's hand very heartily.

Nell took the opportunity to transfer herself to a stool near the fire, and shading her face with her hand, took a smiling survey of the new guest. The latter, as soon as released from the sailor's rough welcome, gave him a letter, which he turned over and over again, without opening.

"The fiend take it!" he said at last, throwing the paper into the fire. "I was never at college, and there's an end of it. But I see it's all right; you are the popisher I'm to take out for ballast? On the skit, eh? And the young un is your kid?"

"You are well informed; I am the man—Claude Duval."

"Very well, cast anchor and take in beef and grog," continued the jolly mariner, a true specimen of the fine old blusterous English sailor before white kid gloves were worn on quarterdecks. "We can't sail before to-morrow, 'cause of the tide—meanwhile you're d—d welcome, and depend on't Jack Edwards

takes you over the herring-pond as safe as a keg of brandy."

"And give me the sweet boy: I will nurse him for you, master; I see he doth not much affect your rough beard," said the girl, extending her arms, and little Mervyn leaped joyously into them. "Ah! how I love him already. How like he is to the Cupid painted over the duke's playhouse."

"Why, what ails the boy?" said Duval, smiling, "frightened of a pretty girl, thou milk-sop?"

"Nay, but I am so cold," shivered the little urchin, creeping closely to the bosom of his young nurse, who, clasping him fondly, and putting her rosy cheek to his, formed unconsciously a group of extreme beauty.

"Ay, warm thee there, thou true chip of the old block," said Claude. "Where should faith be found in this world if not in a woman's heart?"

"Hollo, Moll!" exclaimed Edwards, "run and bring a can of punch, and tell your mistress to make it smack more of the brandy; I'm sure it don't stand her much in customs. And now, sir, try that ere beef—prime Hamburg dried, sir."

"I have ordered a stewed fowl," said Claude.

"What's a stewed fowl to take in for a sea-voyage?" exclaimed the captain. "It may do as a finish off, like bran over the barrels; but for a beginning, nothing like a good bottom, say I!"

Thus pressed, Claude set to work at the dish before him, and in spite of coarse bread and a dirty cloth, soon found it very appetizing. It was curious how quickly he took the tone of the society; he used the slang dialect as if accustomed to it, toasted the ladies, drank with the men, and became in a few minutes a general favourite of all, and particularly of Nell.

Claude was surprised at the vivacity and wit of the young ballad-singer, and she seemed pleased with his sprightly gallantry, a circumstance which by no means delighted Captain Edwards. Jokes, not remarkable for decency, passed; and Claude remarked with interest that Nell frequently coloured up, as if not quite habituated to the free and easy style in conversation.

In the height of this scene, Mrs. Bradley entered with the stewed fowl, followed by an idiotic-looking boy, who carried a white stone bottle of brandy, and a silver tankard of sack. These articles were placed before Claude, and pursuant to invitation, Mrs.

Bradley seated herself at table with him. Claude asked all around to partake, but all refused excepting merry Nell, who protested with an arch smile, that she was tired of salt beef. There was some little difficulty about finding Nell a seat higher than her stool, till Duval bethought him of turning his chair down, so that the sprightly orange-girl and he sat balancing each other; to do which, however, it was necessary at times to catch hold of one another to keep the scale true, and the whole affair was conducted with such laughter and good-humoured gaiety on all sides, that Edwards grew more and more sullen and silent. Nobody noticed this, however, until Moll Creswold, who had been silently picking a bone and watching, gave him a slap which broke his revery.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear?" said she, with a knowing smile at Nell Gwyn and the courtly valet, who were at the moment jingling glasses together to each other's health.

"It's a cram; I don't care a splash of an oar about her, the slut!" said he, contradicting her look rather than her words. "Why, Moll, your'e as good-looking as her o' Sundays, and don't change with every wind that blows. Come here, girl, and sit on my knee:

I'll give thee them gold ear-rings with their bright stones, which I found on the drowned lady at Stralsund. I meant them for Nell, but she's better suited."

And with a glance of huge indignation at poor Nell, he pulled Moll Creswold to him, nothing loth, and triumphantly installed her in the august position indicated. The girl's eye flashed, and she almost snatched the jewels from Edwards as he drew them fiercely out of his breast-pocket.

"Nay then, if you deprive Mistress Nell of her place, she must have another," said Claude, by a gentle movement transferring Nell to his own knee. The girl laughed musically, and for a moment Edwards looked seriously inclined to pick a quarrel, but on second thoughts continued sullenly smoking his pipe.

"Come now, darling Nelly, this is all nonsense," said mine host, speaking for the first time in a subdued tone, as became the helpmate of Mrs. Temperance Bradley. "Do give over your skitting, there's a fine woman, and sing the captain that song wot you were going on with when mister what's-his-name came in."

"Shall I, Jack?" said the girl, smilingly parting Mervyn's hair, who, having eaten his fill, resumed

his place on her lap, for she had extricated herself from Claude.

At this moment the loud jangling bell of the innyard was heard, and Moll Creswold was obliged to resign her new honours to answer it.

"Do what you like, girl; you're not what I took ye for," growled Edwards, puffing his tobacco very fiercely. "Do what you like—it's nothing to me."

"Nay, then, I should slap you on the face, for spoiling your good looks for nothing," said Nell, playfully. "But now, Jack, you don't pretend to like Moll Creswold half so well as me?"

"Why, Nell—zounds! you know there's nothing on earth I loves better than you, when you behaves yourself like a lady," said Edwards, looking up with a somewhat brightened expression.

"Well then, Jack, I'll sing you your favorite song, and we'll be friends again," said Nell, extending her hand, which the honest sailor let his pipe fall to grasp, and wrung it so hard that she screamed out, half laughing at the same time. She was then opening her little ruddy mouth to sing, after bespeaking attention with a smiling glance around, when Moll Creswold re-entered, followed by a tall stranger.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT FIRE.

THE new guest at the Aumerle Arms, entered making a profound bow. He was wrapped in a large white woollen cloak and hood, with his hat slouched down to his eyes. He was armed with a blunderbuss and sword, and altogether resembled one of the city watchmen, who at that period wore a peculiar costume.

"Don't disturb yourselves, ladies and gentlemen," said the stranger in a deep hoarse tone. "I am a cove in difficulties, and this here warm covering is borrowed without leave from a gentleman whom I

knocked down for following me too close, when I didn't want to salute my acquantainces."

Duval was disagreeably struck with some of the tones in the man's voice, which also seemed somehow or another counterfeited. He turned and remarked without any pleasure, a pair of glittering eyes fixed upon him; the rest of the countenance was concealed.

"Don't be afraid, captain," said Moll, smiling with a good deal of malicious meaning. "The gemman is a real flash swell—but gover'ment and he can't agree about some little matter; I think they want to grab his scrag, and he don't encourage the ideer, that's all—eh, Tom?"

"That's all, and enough too," replied Tom with a hoarse laugh. "I hear they've prepared apartments for me in Newgate, and a chaplain; but I a'nt so fond of taking mine ease in irons. They've hunted me out of Whitefriars itself—curse'em!—and one of the bloodhounds would have nabbed me last night, as I took a ride out by Hounslow, but for this old barker of mine. Molly, my dear, bring me a pipeful of that ere bitter backy, and a pot of brown George, and I'm snug for the night."

So saying, the worthy drew a stool behind a projection of the fire-place, and there seemed to give himself up to the undisturbed enjoyment of the restoratives he had ordered.

Claude's attention, however uneasily called to this personage, was now diverted by Nell, who asked if he liked sea-songs. Claude gallantly replied that he liked any thing she liked, and solicited her to fulfil her promise and sing. The girl then began in her sweet musical tones, glancing from Claude to Edwards with eyes brimful of comic humour.

NELL GWYN'S SONG.

The sea, the sea, is England's,
  And England's shall remain,
Tho' the might of France, and the world advance,
  To contest our ocean reign!
Quoth gallant Blake, as he spread his sails,
  And his cannon shook the waves;
Fire away, boys! for the day is ours,
  Or here, lads, foam our graves.
Fire away, boys! quoth he again,
  For the sea, the sea, is England's,
And England's shall remain!

The fresh winds blowing loud and strong,
  The Spaniard fled—which rare is—
And we chased them far, and we chased them long,
  Till they anchored in Canaries.

Quoth our admiral, as their castles blazed
  With guns like a stormy night,
Do they think to frighten us? Fire away, boys,
  For old England's might and right!
Fire away, boys! quoth he again;
  For the sea, the sea, is England's,
And England's shall remain!

We sunk and burned and we took them all,
  With gold and spices laden,
And our sweethearts each had a jolly haul,
  For each loved his English maiden;
But as home we came—quoth our admiral,
  I'm going, lads, aloft!
And he died with a smile, but his dying word
  Was, Fire away, boys! now board her! soft!
Fire away, boys! quoth he again,
  For the sea, the sea, is England's,
And England's shall remain.

"What dost thou call that song, lass?" said Edwards, wiping his eyes. "Lawk-amercy, I recollect old Blake as plain as a pikestaff, and good reason I should, for says he to me one day—it was the day we licked the Dutch off Portland—I was but a youngster then, and had never been in action afore—Says he to me,—I was astanding near my gun, and my teeth chattering, like most green things afore they've seen a reg'lar good set-to—says he: 'Now mind, Jack, stick to your gun, for if you don't, younker, I'll blow your brains out!'—and

then he turns away, and if I didn't see him wipe his eyes in his sleeve, my name isn't Jack Edwards—that's all." And he smoked away with great vehemence.

"'Tis called Blake's last cruise—here 'tis, in the Ever Green," said Nell, producing a ballad.

"I'll buy one of thee, Nell, and there's the ransom," said the captain, clutching the ballad, and tossing the songstress a gold doubloon.

"You have it now—an old song for your money," said Moll Creswold, with a tart laugh.

"And I'll have another, though it cost me double," said Claude Duval.

"You shall have one for nothing," said Nell, with a provoking smile at Edwards.

"Hark ye, Mr. Dooval," said Edwards, swallowing his punch in one huge gulp, and looking as if he could almost cry. "Ye're a foreigner, and I hears that you cursed French frogs don't understand the proper English way of boxing—but you're great hands at the sword. Now I don't pretend to know more of that sort of thing than a reg'lar downright cut and come again, and you I suppose know all the dancing tricks of fence—but as I was

a saying—wot was it?—why, d—n me, if I stand it—that's all."

"Bravo, Jack!—go it, salt un!" shouted the gentleman in the woollen cloak.

"And I'll begin by making an example of you, sir, for interfering where you have no concern. Well, Mr. Dooval, will you 'cept my proposition?"

"Are you mad, captain, or do you forget whence or why I come?" said Claude.

"Why don't Nell then pay me proper attention, as she ought," said the captain, ruefully. "An't I a-going to marry her some day?"

"Come—come, let's all be friends and comfortable—Help us!—what have we to do to quarrel?" said the little host, his eyes overflowing with maudlin tears. "Come, come—agree, agree and grace'll come upon ye!—and let's have another bowl of punch, wife."

"It's Sunday morning!" said the muffled guest, in a tone of mock sanctity, which made the company laugh heartily.

"What matters that?" said Edwards, jovially, for Nell had resumed her place beside him, taking care, however, to place Mervyn between them. "We'll

have another bowl for a parter—they'll not grudge us a little pleasure in Heaven, seeing they've so much of it there themselves."

This argument was considered decisive; and Mrs. Bradley, who had fallen into a deep snore, was roused to prepare another bowl of the exhilarating nectar. But at this moment Moll rushed in, wild with joy, to announce that most delightful of all spectacles to a London mob—a great fire. There was really something fiendish in the girl's delight as she announced the greatness of the mischief. "The fire had broken out at Master Farryner's, the king's baker; the houses on each side were in a blaze, and the engines could not play for want of water, so that a glorious bonfire was expected."

This was enough. The whole society instantly rose, and some ran out, while others threw open the windows. Among the latter were Claude and the gentleman in the woollen cloak. The river and sky in the direction of the fire were illuminated by a broad blaze, over which the church of St. Magnus, at the top of the hill, seemed like a gigantic spectre coming in clouds of darkness. The bells of many churches were ringing an alarum; people were running in all directions, watermen driving their wher-

ries towards the shore—every thing in commotion. This was irresistible; host and guests, all poured out. Claude snatched up little Mervyn, offered his arm to Nell, who gladly accepted it, and they joined the general rush. As he pressed down the stairs he thought he felt some one clutch him by the cloak, but the grasp was loosened instantly, and turning, he saw Tom the highwayman pushing past. Supposing it might be accidental, Claude hastened on, and crossing the bridge had no need to inquire his way to the scene of destruction.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PURSUIT.

NEARLY all Fish-street was in a blaze. In spite of every exertion which the cumbrous engines of the time, worked by the inhabitants, could make, the whole street seemed one vast mass of flames. These were rapidly spreading—a whirlwind of smoke and sparks was driving down the hill towards London Bridge. A strong east wind seconded the violence of the flames, and the wooden houses filled with timber and marine stores, seemed like prepared fuel.

A large crowd watched the progress of these events; yells, screams, shouts for help, resounded

on every side, but the great mass looked on in stupid amazement. The distracted inhabitants were endeavouring to save their goods, and all was the wildest confusion. A few constables appeared, but they also seemed out of their senses, and did nothing but vainly exhort the crowd to order. The confusion was too great to permit Nell to keep her protector's arm; he saw her forced away in the crowd without the power of resistance. But shortly afterwards, he perceived her standing beside a dashing cavalier, who was laughing and shouting at the flames.

The conflagration continued with increased fury, and Claude, with emotions of awe, heard the shout which announced the appearance of flames from the steeple of St. Magnus. In a few minutes the whole church was in one vast blaze.

Meanwhile shouts of "Fire!" resounded over the whole city, and the population began to pour out in every direction, mad with mingled fear and curiosity; for rumours were now heard that the catholics had formed a plot to burn London; and a mad fanatic rushed through the streets, yelling—"God's great judgment! London is falling, London

is fated! Nothing can save the Jezabel of cities! Lo, the Lord blows the flames with the great bellows of his winds!"

The arrival of the Lord Mayor, and a small division of the trainbands, seemed only to add to the general distraction. In a short time the fire had increased so terribly that all Thames-street seemed in one continued blaze. The riot and confusion which prevailed began to make it dangerous even to look on, especially for a foreigner, as rumours were afloat that either the French or Dutch, with both of whom we were then at war, had concerted a plan, with the Jesuits, to sack and burn London. Claude grew apprehensive for his own and the boy's safety, and thought it would be more prudent to regain his inn, and seek out Edwards. But to his surprise and consternation he found that the fire had worked round, and that several houses on the bridge were already in a blaze.

For some minutes he was in doubt what to do, but finding himself already an object of suspicious scrutiny to several muffled men about him, he thought it best to beat a retreat. Accordingly he made his way down an obscure alley leading to the river, intending, if possible, to get a boat; but he

had scarcely stumbled half way down the uneven causeway, ere he felt himself seized by the collar behind, and a voice which made his heart leap, shouted—"Stop, rogue!" Turning sharply at this ominous greeting, Claude perceived the gentleman in the woollen cloak, whose appearance had already excited his suspicions.

"Diable! que voulez vous?" exclaimed Duval in his first surprise, and fumbling confusedly for his sword; but the stranger was too sharp for him, and seized his wrist in such a gripe that, embarrassed as he was with the child, he felt it useless to attempt resistance.

"Don't struggle, it's of no use," said the captor, very coolly, and raising the flap of his hat, he revealed the countenance of Colonel Blood. "And now you know me, I suppose you have no objection to go with me before a magistrate? I have a warrant—here it is—to arrest you as a French spy. I have plenty of assistance at hand, so you had better go quietly at once."

"It is impossible; you have mistaken your man," said Claude.

"Fal-de-ral!" replied the colonel. "Are you not my Lord Aumerle's French valet? Surrender,

or I blow your brains in the gutter. You know me, I see, by your quaking eyes. No more humbug, but come along."

"I will not stir a foot. I tell you, colonel, you are mistaken," said Claude, unawed by the pistol presented at his head. "Fire, if you dare; it is murder."

"That child in your arms protects you, fool, or we would jump that," grumbled Blood, dropping the muzzle. "We must try another way with you. Ho! Hill, Green! dogs! where are they?"

He touched the spring of a rattle, which gave a peculiar sound, probably well understood by his confederates, and three or four men, dressed as constables and well-armed, ran down the court. Blood then, by a sudden movement, endeavoured to seize the child, shouting to his comrades to aid; but dexterously taking the opportunity to release his hand, Claude retreated a few steps, drew his sword, and made a blow at his antagonist, which cut the hat off his head, and grazed his brow.

"Why, then, have at ye! To hell, French dog!" shouted Blood, firing his pistol.

Luckily, in the darkness and hurry of his aim, the bullets passed Claude, who, meanwhile, shouted

"Murder!" "Robbery!" "Help!" with all his might. In a moment Blood, observing the ill-success of his shot, drew his hanger, and rushed to the attack. His satellites followed his example, and, in a few seconds, Claude was driven with his back against a door, where he stood resolutely defending himself.

Some of the inhabitants of this dark region, hearing his cries, put their heads out of window, and joined the outcry without attempting any assistance. Blood, however, continued exhorting his assassins not to hurt the child, and their fear to do so did Claude yeoman's service. Nevertheless, the combat must have been very briefly decided, as, though perfect master of his weapon, it was impossible to withstand such odds, when a new ally suddenly appeared.

"Shiver my timbers!" shouted the voice of one coming up the alley, "five to one! it isn't fair! What, Mounseer Dooval! Stand to it, sir, and Jack Edwards is your backer."

A vigorous arm, wielding a cutlass, followed up this address, which cut one of the ruffians down, and Claude heard a whistle evidently blown in the agitation of the combat. He was now en-

gaged hand-to-hand with Blood, the child screaming and clinging round his neck, embarrassing his movements, though in some measure protecting him. The whistle produced a similar effect to the rattle in summoning new combatants, but on the contrary side. A number of sailors appeared at the entrance of the alley, who, seeing their captain engaged, instantly knew which side to take, and rushed to the rescue. The superiority of numbers was now on Claude's side, and even the ferocious Blood, observing his men fly in all directions, found it impossible to keep the field, and ran off shouting for help in the king's name, and raising the terrible view-halloo, "A popish spy! a popish spy!"

Claude knew that this call would not long remain unanswered, and after hurriedly thanking Edwards for his opportune aid, which the generous seaman swore was only what he would have done to any man in similar need, let alone his freight, they consulted about what was best to be done. Edwards, who had a sailor's dread of meddling in matters where the law seemed to thrust herself, advised that they should all get on board his vessel as fast as possible. Claude agreed in this opinion, and they ran to the water's edge, where, at Edwards' shout,

"Sculler! sculler!" a small wherry shot from behind a vessel towards them. Claude, Edwards, and little Mervyn, with two of the sailors, leaped in, and rowed out into the middle of the river, to get clear of the numberless boats and barges rushing about.

This attempt was, however, soon found a failure. The waters near London bridge were crowded with every description of craft, barges, boats, rafts, floating furniture, casks, timber, bedding—as if a great fleet had suffered wreck some short time previously.

Claude, who felt certain that Blood's design was not on him but on his young charge, grew every instant more nervous at the delay. He represented to Edwards that their pursuers would undoubtedly overtake them on the river, where resistance would be impossible. He therefore thought it would be best for the captain to land him, and bring his own barge to meet him at the Tower stairs, as early as possible in the morning. This plan was thought feasible, and executed instantly; they drove their boat on the sands near London Bridge, and Claude made the best of his way through back lanes to Eastcheap, while Edwards went in a contrary direction, to fulfil his part of the contract.

Stepping into an obscure inn, Duval ordered wine and bread for breakfast, and snugly ensconced in a dark corner, listened to the various and conflicting reports of the numerous visitants. He heard that the fire was raging with increased fury—that all attempts to stop its progress were vain—that the Lord Mayor was out of his senses—that Sir John Robinson and the guards from the Tower were parading the streets—and, that the burning houses were ransacked as if in a city given up to pillage.

As to the cause of the conflagration, opinions differed with every individual—the French, the Dutch, the Jesuits, having each their vehement partisans. Unable at last to sit quiet, with his mercurial blood, while a whole city was in commotion, Claude borrowed an old cloak of the landlord, and sallied forth again into the tumult.

The morning was just breaking, but the denseness of the smoke, and the fiery darkness of the atmosphere, made the dawn unnoticed. Soldiers of the city bands were stationed in the streets, to prevent the masses from rushing up and down; but all subordination was now at an end; no man heeded authority or entreaties; terror had broken the bonds of

fear and reverence, and society seemed resolving itself into its first wild elements.

Claude observed some few who still kept their senses, endeavouring to pull down the houses adjacent to those already in flames, but the mass of fire driven in tremendous billows before the wind, defied all their efforts. The wooden houses, whose projecting balconies furnished a ready-made train, continued to blaze away, and as their owners were principally dealers in oil, pitch, tar, brandy, ropes, and timber, the conflagration frequently burst out into raging furnaces of the most beautiful white and coloured flames. Men's ruling passions seemed now heightened to delirium; some cursed and howled imprecations over their ruin, others knelt in the muddy streets, sung hymns and prayed with frantic enthusiasm, as if the end of the world were come.

Thames-street was now reduced to a heap of red-hot ruins; Gracechurch-street was all a blaze, and the two great lines of houses on each side—Lombard and Fenchurch-street—had caught the fiery contagion. Churches—the flaming giants of the scene—towered over the ocean of fire, blazing to their very summits.

At this time the conflagration had assumed the shape of an immense bow of fire, and the same fanatic who had previously harangued the crowd, pointed this out to them.

"Behold the bow—no longer the bow of promise but of destruction!" he exclaimed, with frantic vehemence. "Behold the presage, not of water but of fire—not of mercy but of utter up-rooting—not of pardon but of wrath, for ever! The arrows of God are flaming in it! Woe to thee, London! Sodom of cities! Who shall stand in the gap for thee!"

Escaping from this madman and the intense heat of the surrounding flames, Claude thought that he had best make his way to the Tower, to meet Edwards. But he soon found himself baffled in this plan; soldiers were in possession of all the outlets to the shore, and refused, in spite of all his representations, to let him pass without a written order from the Lord Mayor. The latter functionary he heard was at Whitehall, where the council had met in confusion, to debate on what was proper to be done. Moreover, the idea occurred to Claude, that such a request from a foreigner at that juncture, could produce no other effect than to consign him to a dungeon. Not knowing what else to do, he

now strove to return to his inn—but on approaching it, he found it already in a blaze. In this dilemma, concluding that he should be least noticed in the deepest confusion, he followed the sweep of the crowd through the fiery city. Even little Mervyn's terror had now given place to admiration, and when they stopped before the Exchange, which was in one vast blaze, he clapped his hands with a kind of joy.

The hours of this dreadful day past in the overwhelming emotion of all men's minds, like centuries in a dream. None kept count, and not a gleam of daylight penetrated the crimson air. The sun, indeed, hung above like a bloody circle, but seemed to give neither light nor warmth. The confusion, the outcries, drowned all recollection.

Claude, like the rest, was insensible to the passage of time. He wandered about amidst the confusion, stunned and stupified by the noise and cries, and the universal terror, but no one seemed to heed him. The streets were choked with furniture and goods from the burning houses; carts laden with the more precious commodities were locked and confused together, so as to paralyze all attempts to bring assistance.

Claude stood gazing in mute terror, and almost suffocated with smoke, at the gigantic mass of flames presented by the burning Guildhall, when he felt the tassel of his cloak pulled. He started round, and saw, what in the dense smoke appeared to be the spectre of a young girl, so pale and ghastly were her features. A moment's attention, however, told him that it was Nell Gwyn, so lately the merriest of the merry. Claude's gallantry had not, however, totally deserted him.

"Sweet Mistress Nell!" he exclaimed, when she interrupted him with an emphatic gesture.

"Don't speak to me that way now—it is too terrible!" she exclaimed. "I have just made my escape from that wicked lord with whom you saw me—his name is Rochester—but his blasphemous wit is too horrible. O, Claude, do you think this is the day of judgment?"

"If not, we shall not see a worse till it comes!" replied Duval.

"And that poor child!" exclaimed the girl, bursting into tears. "But I forget, Claude; I have been seeking you for hours, to put you on your guard. I heard that detestable looking villain in the white cloak, inquiring for you everywhere—

describing you exactly—but people are so lost in misery, they can't tell what he means. Ah! good Lord be gracious! yonder he is."

She pointed through a rush of fiery dust, to a figure standing on a high horse-stone, and apparently shouting while he directed some operations. A glance at his terrible countenance, lighted by the congenial glare of the conflagration, was enough for Claude.

"I must run for it, Nell—my life is on a cast, and the child's too!" he exclaimed. "But if you would merit Heaven's pardon for any little sin of yours, do an act of charity for me! You will find Edwards waiting me at the Tower stairs—the sentinels will let you pass—tell him to go on to Whitehall, and be there by ten to-night—if it is not that already."

"I will," said Nell, resolutely; "but look to the child, Claude, he is white as snow."

Duval then, fearful of attracting his persecutor's eye, gratefully pressed the girl's hand, leaving a moidore in it, and vanished before she could return it, as she wished to do.

News that both sides of Cheapside were on fire, turned the great stream of gazers in that direction,

and Duval joined it. The mob was arrested in its progress near Mercer's chapel, by the sudden pouring in of four simultaneous fires, which here met as in a common reservoir. Threadneedle-street, Walbrook, and Bucklersbury, now lay open, and immense vistas of flames were revealed by the fall of all the intervening houses. The roar of breaking timbers, the dust, the smoke, the suffocating smoulder, were succeeded by a solid mass of flames a hundred feet in height. Raising a yell of terror, the mob rushed past, carrying Claude with it, and he presently found himself one of a vast and silent multitude, gazing on the destruction of the great cathedral of London—the magnificent St. Paul's of Inigo Jones. It was a scene such as an imagination of surpassing grandeur might have dreamed, but no human eye had ever seen before—the sublime of terror. There was a vast mob, but were all hushed into the silence of extreme awe. Innumerable faces, pale, haggard, and as if changed into stone, so fixed was their affrighted expression, were turned towards the spectacle.

Claude stood behind a group of horsemen richly garbed, one only of whom—a tall, olive-complexioned man with a very brilliant eye—was co-

vered. This personage Claude soon learned was the King; another rider, covered with dust and grime, he recognised as the Duke of York. The cavalier with whom he had seen Nell Gwyn was also near the king, holding the bridle of his horse, which snorted with terror as every gust of wind blew showers of burning sparks among them. A few soldiers, fixed like men of bronze, stood around—but no one stirred—the uselessness of all resistance seemed tacitly allowed.

The heat was now intolerable, and Claude thought that the stones beneath his feet were turning red-hot; but the fascination of terror kept all chained totihe spot. St. Paul's—the great St. Paul's, the glory of London—was in flames! The whole summit of the church, (for the wind had conveyed the elements of destruction there first,) was in a blaze. The galleries were wrapped in luminous torrents; shining volleys of flame burst out every instant in every direction, and baffled all hope of saving the enormous building. The lead was melting like snow before the sun, from the vast roofs; the stupendous beams, the enormous masses of stone, were yielding and falling with deafening uproar, and crushing in the roof of the church of St. Faith,

which grew like an excrescence on the majestic structure above.

To add to the terrors of this scene, numbers of the sick—some dying of the still lingering plague—were borne past on their beds, or in blankets. One was carried close to Claude, in the last agonies, covered with purple sores, and yelling hideously as he pointed to the flames.—"Hell, hell!"

The scene had now attained its highest pitch of horror, and St. Paul's presented for some minutes the appearance of a cathedral built of fire, till at length the roof fell in, with a roar like that of the sea breaking on a rock in a storm. All then became one immense pyramid of fire, the flames of which lapped the sky. Yet even in this terrific moment, Claude heard the king whisper to the cavalier at his bridle, "Oddsfish, man, methinks I only need a fiddle to substantiate the comparison with Nero which my loving subjects are constantly making."

"Faith, sire, I think this will stop their complaints about the want of fuel," replied the cavalier. "The citizens may roast their dinners here cheap enough."

"Look, Wren! what sort of immortality have you architects?" continued the king, turning to a

grave-looking man in sad-colored brocade, who seemed attentively watching the conflagration. "See you there! Inigo's magnificent portico is fuel for a bonfire."

"'Tis possible to build one that shall surpass it, sire," returned the architect.

"Will you then be our Michael Angelo, doctor?" replied the king, smiling.

"Yes, an' it please your majesty," replied Wren, smiling too, but with a deep flush, and a luminous sparkle of the eye.

At this moment Claude was conscious that some one was looking at him intently, over a wall of the churchyard, on which clustered a throng of the lowest populace. To feel that this gazer was Blood, and that he was detected, was in Claude simultaneous with an attempt to fly. For some minutes, however, the turbulence of the crowd made it impossible to force a way; but he succeeded at length in reaching an open place. Certain now that he was still pursued, he resolved to make for Whitehall as fast as possible. That he was followed was, however, in a few minutes evident, for as he turned into Holborn, then a long succession of straggling houses and gardens, he heard voices shouting,

"Stop him, stop him! a Jesuit, a spy!" and louder than all, resounded Blood's dread tones.

These cries seemed to lend Claude wings; leaving the burning city in his rear, he ran, with the child in his arms, over the fields between Holborn and the Strand. Still he imagined he heard voices calling to each other, and the distant tramp of pursuers; and he continued running as fast as his living burden permitted, until he reached a stile near the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Here he ventured to breathe and look round; but his consternation was again excited by observing several men with torches and drawn swords, crossing the opposite hedge. To leap the stile, and resume his flight, was but a moment's thought; still the pursuers had evidently caught sight of their prey, and renewed the chase with loud halloos.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT.

Collecting his fainting strength with a last effort, Duval continued his course rapidly, and leaving the palace and gardens of Whitehall on his left, plunged down a passage between two dead walls, which led to the stairs where Edwards was to meet him. In a moment his feet were on the lowest step of the landing-place—in vain!—not a living soul appeared, nought but the river was there, rolling in the fiery fog which enveloped all things. He drew his sword, and looked around to ascertain if no less desperate resource presented itself. The balustrade leading to the river had a

slight projection, behind which he thought it barely possible to remain concealed; and he ensconced himself in it almost at the same moment that the flash of torchlight appeared on the summit of the stairs. Glancing upward, he perceived Blood, followed by three or four of his myrmidons; the former waved a torch, and hung eagerly forward, while his ill-omened countenance expressed extreme vexation and surprise. Claude saw that they paused, and entered into eager discussion—Blood persisting that he had seen him run down the steps, another ruffian asserting that he ran on farther.

"He must be drowned, colonel, if he went down here," said one.

"If that's the case, I don't want his carcass to feed my hounds on," replied Blood, sullenly. "But I must be sure the brat's safe—I would not for five hundred pounds he escaped us. Come on, bullies! Your torch, Berry!" and snatching the brand, he moved slowly and circumspectly down the stairs, looking earnestly forward to the water, probably expecting to behold some signs of recent immersion.

Claude's heart beat thick, but he moved not a muscle; and the boy too seemed hushed by sympa-

thetic terror. At this moment the dash of oars was heard, figures approached through the fog, and Claude heard the boisterous voice of Edwards, shouting, "Mr. Dooval, Mr. Dooval!" but music never sounded half so sweet to his ear.

"Here I am—help—murder—quick!" shouted Claude, springing up, and rushing down the steps waving his sword.

"Row, boys, row!" yelled Edwards in reply, and with a few lightning strokes of the oar they were close to the shore. Blood, however, recovered his presence of mind in an instant, though struck at first by this sudden apparition, and sprung at Claude, shouting to his men to follow. The subsequent events past with the bewildering rapidity of a dream. Claude remembered exchanging a sharp clash with his enemy's sword, and that in his desperation he threw the child to Edwards, who fortunately caught it in his arms. Then, at the moment when all the ruffians poured themselves upon him, he called to Edwards to row off, and leaped into the water. Blood had, however, clutched his cloak firmly, and held him as he buffeted with the water, calling lustily on his men to shoot him.

Edwards dashed the boat back to the rescue, and

made a slash at the colonel with his cutlass—but it was parried by Berry. Observing then that Claude was nearly strangled by the tightness of the cloak round his neck, he drew his keen blade across it, severing the skirts from the collar. Some of the sailors instantly dragged Duval on board, almost senseless, and Edwards gave the order to row out. But the cloak—that cloak which contained so many invaluable documents—remained in Blood's hands!

Meanwhile the colonel, furious at his victim's escape, called to his men to fire on the boat—that they were popish conspirators escaping—and a volley of musketry followed their retreat. Luckily all missed, though the shot rained in the water on all sides, and Edwards, stimulating his men by threats and promises, seized an oar himself, and dashed furiously off. In the distance, however, he heard Blood shouting, "A sculler! a sculler!—twenty pounds for a sculler!" A vessel answering the call, instantly shot from the opposite shore, and Edwards had no doubt but that they should be vigorously pursued.

In the first confusion of his escape, Claude forgot his cloak and every thing else; and when he missed it, intense as was his regret, to attempt to regain it

would have been madness. Moreover, the extreme danger in which they were, quickly absorbed all thoughts but those of self-preservation. A boat, well-manned by their pursuers, appeared in the middle of the river, in their wake, and the deep hoarse voice of Blood was heard, cursing and shouting to the people on the waters, to stop the French incendiaries, who were flying from justice. So great, however, was the panic caused by the fire, and men's ignorance of what they had to dread, that no one offered any obstruction.

Nothing could equal the rapidity of the flight but that of the pursuit; one boat followed the other, like the bloodhound after his prey. Many shots were fired by the pursuers, but still the hurry and confusion made them all ineffectual; and now, straining every nerve, the fugitives approached London Bridge. Nothing ever surpassed the dreadful magnificence of that spectacle. The sky above was like one vast vault of redhot brass, in which shone a pale moon; the shores on each side seemed like measureless furnaces, as if indeed the whole earth were on fire. The roar of the flames was like that of the sea. All around the bridge appeared like a vast hill of fire, or rather an ocean of flames which the

wind drove into monstrous billows. The terror of the scene, and the violence of their exertions, chilled the ardour of Edwards's men, and in spite of his threats and Claude's entreaties, Blood was obviously gaining upon them as they approached London Bridge.

A sight awaited them there which seemed likely to put a finish to the matter. The bridge was one mass of flames supported on arches of fire; houses were crumbling down, timbers falling and hissing in the water, burning tar-barrels floated past, and almost every description of furniture and goods was tossed madly out of the windows into the river. Beneath and amidst this terrible bower of fire, held up by mere cohesion of redhot masses, it was necessary to pass if they would escape. Edwards's sailors paused involuntarily on their oars.

It was indeed a tremendous sight; the numberless arches of the bridge, and the blazing houses on it, forming a mass of fire which seemed to tower to the sky itself. On each side, as far as the eye could reach, rolled eddying seas of flame, bounded only by the horizon.

In this perilous moment, the native gallantry of the English seaman broke out in all its peerless

lustre. "D—n it, lads!" exclaimed the captain, at the pitch of a voice which had often been louder than the sea in a gale—"it shall never be said that Jack Edwards was the man to desert his friend in danger. Pull away, boys; the rascals dare not follow."

The brave seamen raised a hearty cheer, and seizing their oars again, rushed into the blaze.

Blood and his myrmidons rested awestruck on their oars, near the entrance of this terrific volcano, probably expecting the destruction of the fugitives. Edwards's boat, and the persons in it, appeared for a moment all crimson in the glare; they reached the burning arch, and as they shot under it, a gunsmith's shop above blew up with a tremendous roar. A whirlwind of black smoke and fire instantly enveloped them, and when it cleared up, boat and voyagers had alike disappeared from the pursuers' eyes. Whether or not they had perished in the rush of ruins, it was impossible to ascertain, and Blood, muttering a fearful curse, threw himself back exhausted in his barge.

The fugitives themselves, if interrogated, would have been unable to declare by what exertions, or rather by what chances, they escaped; but they

found themselves floating like men in a dream, opposite the Tower. Claude's alarms, however, had not subsided even when in comparative safety, and though the loss of his precious cloak nearly drove him mad, he felt that all that could be done was to ensure the safety of the young boy, thus obstinately menaced. Cheering the exhausted watermen with the promise of a gold doubloon a piece if they renewed their exertions, he and Edwards each seized an oar. The burning shores of the river gave them ample light, but it was only by great skill that they avoided the numberless impediments in the waters.

The tide was in their favour, and they drifted down to Shadwell without difficulty, when once clear of the bridge and wharfs. Edwards's barge, well armed and manned, awaited them there. Once on board this craft they proceeded on their voyage to Woolwich in gallant style; but it was midnight before they leaped on the schooner's deck, and could pronounce themselves safe.

Still Edwards was apprehensive of pursuit, and as the wind served, he raised his anchors instantly, and they shot down the river, at a rate which soon left the earthly Tartarus behind them out of sight.

When morning dawned, Black Betsy, as the schooner was called, had dropped far down the river, and all cause for apprehension seemed gone.

The vessel and the crew were both of a kind by no means unusual in those stormy and daring times. It was a tight little schooner, admirably adapted to the dangerous coast-trading in which it was, somewhat unlawfully, engaged; but being originally intended for more peaceful service, it was rather awkwardly fitted with war-gear. Still it was the fastest sailer, and the lightest coaster, that evers muggler coveted, and was the darling and pride of every man on board; indeed they all spoke of it with a kind of rough affection, as they did of their sweethearts, and would as soon have knocked the man down who doubted the merits of "poor old Black Bess" as him who insulted their ladye-loves. Withal they were a wild, ferocious sort of fellows, the very rakings of a lawless and disorganized age; men of iron frames and unflinching hearts, whose only law was their captain's will. Even now, though sailing with royal letters of marque, it was doubtful whether the government regarded them as buccaniers or allies; and Edwards showed by his anxiety to avoid the royal

fleet, which lay at the mouth of the river, that he doubted the light in which he was regarded at head-quarters.

Claude found that, splendidly as he was to be recompensed, it entered not into the captain's head to find any thing improbable in the account which it had pleased Lord Aumerle to give. Accordingly he himself passed as a Popish emigrant, and the boy as his son. Meanwhile his anxieties were all transferred to the loss of the papers, jewels, and part of the money which was to bear his expenses. He consoled himself, however, by the reflection that no blame could be imputed to him, since he had perilled his life to preserve them, and that the earl could soon replace his credentials. Claude moreover, was of a merry, hopeful nature, and troubled himself little with the dark side of things.

The wind continued very changeable and capricious, but Edwards's skill seized advantage from every favourable shift, and on the evening of the second day they were in sight of the French coast. The sky and the sea mirrored each other's calmness, and were both of a clear deep blue. Calais arose every instant more distinctly, with its grim walls frowning on the edge of the waters. It was not

Edwards's intention to land them at the town, whither, on account of the war, he dared not approach; but he hoisted a Dutch flag, although there was no vessel in sight, and lay off the coast until sunset. A very brilliant moonlight succeeded, and then the captain steered towards a low headland some leagues to the west of Calais. Every rock and breaker of the coast was as familiar to him as his fields to a villager; but he waited for several hours in expectation of some signal from the shore. Claude at last observed a bright green rocket shoot from a projecting rock, which was answered by the display of a red lamp on their mast-head, when he was informed by the captain that the time had arrived to attempt a debarkation, and the two passengers, himself, and a few seamen, got into the jolly-boat.

The tide was out, and the sea breaking in a mournful murmur on the green rocks which lined the shore, beneath chalky cliffs of great height. The boats stranded on the shallow reefs very soon, and they were obliged to walk and jump over the slippery rocks, until they reached what appeared to be a hole in the cliff, scarce large enough to admit a single man. Guided, however, by Edwards,

they crawled one after the other in, and soon found the hole widen into a spacious sort of passage, formed in the chalk, which terminated, to Claude's great surprise, in a cottage belonging to a fisherman in league with the smugglers. This man and his family received Claude with unbounded kindness, both as being recommended by Edwards, and being of Norman blood, and they readily agreed to do every thing necessary to expedite him on his journey. The captain only staid to drink a cup of brandy, and to exchange a hearty farewell with Claude and little Mervyn, whom he kissed and hugged most affectionately, and then returned to his vessel.

The next day beheld our travellers on their way to Saint Omer, well mounted and armed, though without a passport, Mervyn riding delightedly before his protector. All these good things were procured by a liberal outlay of Claude's doubloons, but he dared not apply for a passport, lest inquiry should be raised. The news of the great fire was already the universal topic in Calais, and Claude desired no questioning on the subject; and as the police of those days was by no means strict, he easily crossed the frontier, and entered Flanders—which was still an appanage of the house of Austria.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN OATES.

It was a fine bright morning, and both travellers were delighted to be once more on *terra firma;* but towards noonday the heat grew so oppressive, that Claude found it necessary to seek shelter for a time. The road was skirted on both sides by very rich meadows, and shaded by broad oaks and chestnuts; and as he had taken the precaution to fill his saddle-bags with such viands as he had deemed good for a journey, he thought they might as well alight and satisfy their appetites, in a pleasant rural way, under the trees. He dismounted, therefore, and turned his horse loose among the green herbage; then hearing

the babbling of a stream at hand, he penetrated a woody ravine on his left, to seek its cool waters. He had not advanced many yards, however, ere he encountered a bony Rosinante of a horse, tied by the leg to a crab-tree, and browsing with famished eagerness. This made him look forward with some anxiety, and he perceived a man stretched, either dead or asleep, on the grass. A few steps farther, and the deep nasal snore which greeted him, showed that the latter was the case.

Duval hesitated as to whether he should retire quietly, or take the society which chance offered. He had all a Frenchman's liking for chatter, but on the whole the stranger did not exactly please him. He was of a low, square-set, ill-built form—his neck short and thick, his arms disproportionately long, and terminated by large bony hands. His visage and features were of a peculiar cast, for the mouth was in the centre of the face, and the disproportionate length of the chin gave him the look of a baboon. This natural ugliness, aided by an expression of low cunning, which the features preserved even in sleep, made it one of the most disagreeable faces Claude had ever seen.

The man was dressed in a suit of dilapidated re-

gimentals, such as were worn by the old guard of Cromwell, and armed with sword and pistols. A dirty leather wallet lay near him, and the relics of a banquet, consisting of very coarse esculents, were scattered about; also a grey-hen, or stone bottle, which had contained some sort of strong liquor.

On the whole Claude thought he would leave the stranger to his slumbers; but it was no longer possible; Mervyn, led by instinctive dislike, lifted a clod, and threw it on the stranger's face. He awoke with a start and a confused curse, and looked around with a pair of small, vicious, pig-eyes, whose expression of alarm almost made Claude laugh. But he civilly explained his purpose in French, and told the stranger that, if it would not interrupt him, he and his little boy would take their dinner in the shade of the fine trees around.

"I understand no French," said the other doggedly, and in a very coarse voice. "But if you know any thing of Aunglish, speak out, and I'll do what I can conscientiously to pleasure ye."

Claude repeated his apology in English, and the stranger having muttered his acquiescence, Claude quietly proceeded to open his larder, consisting of

part of a haunch of venison, and a little keg of the finest brandy, a parting present from his friend, the smuggler. Observing that his new companion viewed these preparations not without emotion, Claude invited him to partake, and soon found that whatever he had eaten previously, he had left off with a competent appetite. He drank in proportion, and soon grew very talkative.

The fire of London was of course the first topic. The stranger had heard nothing of it, but he listened with great interest to Claude's details, interspersing the narrative with oaths and ejaculations of wonder, and testifying great satisfaction on learning that the catholics were considered or suspected as the authors of this vast ruin.

"And what do men say of this paupistical Duke of Yoarck?" he said in his broad manner. "Do they not consider he is at the boattem—the snake coiled at the root of all this offence? 'Slife, I warrant him, he would burn one half of Aungland to make the other a dunghill of damnable paupishtry!'

"I cannot say I think the duke hath any hand in it," replied Claude, "which were methinks as if a man set fire to his own corn to dry it."

"Then without doubt, it is the Jesuits," said the

stranger, accepting with a nod the brandy-bottle which Claude offered.

"Prithee, master," said Duval, somewhat sharply, "speak not so disrespectfully of those Christian fathers—we are not now in England."

"Heaven be praised for that same!" replied the stranger; "for of all the accursed places on earth for an honest man to live in—'slife! a man had better be a dog in any other country!"

"You have been in the army, sir, I presume, from your attire?" said Claude, inquiringly.

"Ay, ay, in two armies, those of God and those of man," replied the gentleman. "But virtue makes enemies wherever it goes, and mine got me kicked out of both services. You may have heard of me—my name's Oates—Captain Oates."

"Faith, I have heard of one parson Oates, who was chaplain on board a man of war, and narrowly escaped the gallows for practices which—"

"Yes, sir, I am that most injured man; the victim of a foul ploat," interrupted the stranger, coolly supping his brandy, though the practices alluded to were certainly such as might have brought a blush to the devil's own cheek. "The captain and his boocanier crew of reprobates could not bear the

wholesome boldness of my holding forth and preaching of the word, wherein I indeed resembled a glorified saint preaching to Lucifer and his fiends; and so they trumped up that lie which, when the day comes, will damn them all to the lowest depth of the bottomless abyss! But they were obliged to avouch my unguiltiness before the commission."

"What scandalous tongues men have!" exclaimed Claude. "I did hear that parson Oates was only saved from dangling at the yard-arm by tenderness to his cloth, and that he was dismissed the service with every possible dishonour and shame."

"I would I could hear the man that durst say so to my face!" said the other, colouring in spite of the habitual brassiness of his complexion. "But to prove mine innocence, I may tell you I was received with joy into the army, and by my great courage and massacring of the popish rebels in Ireland, I was made a captain in my company."

"And was there some new conspiracy?" said Claude.

"Troth, no, but my preenciples were well-known, and being good, protestant, and honest, the Duke of York took some sudden occasion to break me,'

replied the captain. "Some of my men took it into their villanous skulls to plunder and murder some family or other in the wild popish country of Carrickfergus, and I was made responsible—that's all."

"And whither do your bad fortunes lead you now, Mr. Oates?" said Claude.

"Nay, faith, I have left my old floundering guide, honesty, behind, and hope to thrive for the loss," said Oates, smiling grimly. "I am on my way to Pauris, where I mean to enter the French king's sarvice; I hear he needs resolute fellows to carry on his war against these marsh-waddlers of Dutchmen."

"But will not your religious principles be against you, Mr. Oates? You are doubtless one of the independent leaven which Cromwell left in the king's cake?" said Duval.

"'Slife, I'd be a Turk or worship a brazen calf for that matter," exclaimed the captain, who was evidently elated with his brandy. "I don't believe one word of all those old trumperies; the devil take me if I care for him! Oh, no, we understand all that sort of thing now! all hypocrisy and state-tricks! I am not to be bamboozled with a white up-turned eye and a whining twang of the gullet! I was a par-

son myself once, and know that it's all tom-foolery, fal-de-ralla! Did ye ever hear of a quack taking his own nostrum?—ha, ha, ha!"

The captain continued rattling on in this strain for some time; but Claude was rather annoyed than amused by the blasphemies and unseemly anecdotes of his accidental acquaintance, and though by no means very starched in his own principles, he was almost appalled by those of Captain Oates. As their potations deepened, however, each grew more and more confidential, and Claude could not forbear letting some expressions fall which excited the curiosity of his companion.

"Ye say the young kid is yours, Master Dooval?" said the captain. "And as ye can't aducate him to your mind in Aungland, ye are taking him to those venerable men at—where did you say?"

"Saint Omer," replied Claude.

"But I have a papa in England, who is a grand gentleman," said Mervyn, "only he lives in such a dark, big house, close by the water!"

"Auy?" replied the captain, with a suspicious glance at Duval, who smiled and patted his lip with his forefinger.

"I comprehend—I comprehend," continued Oates.

"The old one is in pound, and this young one is to be driven out of the wolf's way. Varry good!—poor lamb! I take an interest in his behalf, Mr. Claude; 'tis a fair child, varry fair, and even as Rauchel mourned over her fruit, calling him Ichabod, which means in the vernacular, Our Glory is departed, even so I—but you say you were robbed, robbed in the great fire, Mr. Claude? How in the woorld (not to ask impertinent questions) do you mean to get on among the Jesuitical rogues without money?"

"Oh, they did not scrape me clean out; I had a fat purse in my doublet, though they stole my cloak," replied Claude, proudly.

"Well, well, I hope no offence," said Oates; "all I mean to say is, I have already told you I am no cant; I doant care about making any of your long hobbledy speeches about faith, hope, and charity, which are but the stock in trade of hypocrisy and your soul-dealers; if I had, I might have been a sleek evangelical of a rogue still. But this I will say—in short, if you want money, Mr. Dooval, to take the poor little wretch to a safe place, here's my purse, and ye're as welcome to dip your hand in it as my own brother."

And so saying, Oates drew out a long red silk purse, which seemed, from the chink and glitter within, to be tolerably well lined.

"If I wanted it, captain, you should be my Jew among a dozen—but see if I do," said Claude, producing his little bag of moidores, and tossing it somewhat ostentatiously in the air, it fell with a massive jingle. The stranger's whole countenance brightened, and he had some difficulty to suppress the chuckle which involuntarily mounted to his throat.

"The Loord knows, it is well for us the popish hounds in these parts have no reason from our appearance to suspect us of such riches," said he, replacing his purse very carefully. "They say these marshes of St. Omer are haunted by all manner of vagabond robbers and thieves, that fear neither Goad nor man; indeed I doubted strongly whether I should go on or spend the night in the next village, but for your company."

"So you're travelling to St. Omer too?" said Duval, though not without a moment's suspicion.

"Yes, sooth, I have diverged from my direct route of Paris, to visit the poor scattered remnant still left there by the merciless councils of the un-

godly paupistical Ahasuerus on the throne of France," replied Oates.

Claude glanced at the short uncomely figure before him, and contrasting it mentally with his own fine athletic person, consented to the arrangement. They continued their conversation for some little time longer, till Claude observing the trees shot with a deep crimson, admonished his companion that it was time to mount and resume their journey.

The travellers were soon again on the road, a wild looking horse-path traversing the heart of a deep forest; and Oates had some difficulty in making his bony hack keep pace with Claude's good steed; but the latter, as if from politeness, took care to keep his companion abreast, and never suffered him to get in the rear.

The conversation was such as the gloomy scenery around naturally excited, and the robberies, murders, and various acts of violence exercised on the road they were traversing, of course formed the staple. Oates pretended to laugh at these stories, but the numerous black crosses skirting the road, each the memento of some act of barbarity, argued well on the other side. From this topic he launched into a dissertation on weapons, and boasted his own to be

the best ever made. To back this assertion he handed his pistols to Claude, who remarked with a slight smile at his own inward thoughts, that they were not loaded. He handed them back with a great increase of confidence, and the dialogue became once more free and cheerful. Oates, in his turn, admired his fellow-traveller's defensive gear, and asked permission to examine the temper of his sword. Claude very readily drew the blade, and flashing it round his head, handed it to the captain, who, apparently by accident, let it fall. Oates made as if he would have dismounted to pick it up, but Claude with thoughtless politeness insisted that it was his fault, and flinging the reins to his companion, leaped to the ground, leaving little Mervyn on the horse.

The point which our travellers had now reached, was the descent of a hill covered by the forest they were traversing, and which commanded an extensive view of a sloping woodland, terminated by the wide marshes of St. Omer. The sun was nigh the horizon, but the whole west still glowed with exquisite colours, darkly reflected in the watery moors which spread in wide desolation beyond. Not a living thing, no human dwelling-place, was visible for many miles round; only a few wild fowl fluttered

over the pools and reedy islets of the marshes, and the towers of the abbey of Clairvaux gleamed in the distance. To the far east indeed the eye could discern the walls and pyramidal steeples of St. Omer, rising on an eminence which terminated the view, but distant several leagues. It was a spot well-suited by its solitude for the commission of deeds of treachery and assassination, and the thought occurred to Claude almost as he stooped to lift the sword. An exclamation of the child, and a slight start of his horse, induced him to spring up suddenly—but it was too late. The captain had seized the pistols from his holsters almost as he leaped down, and now presenting them at their owner's head, very coolly invited him to give up his purse, or prepare to have his brains scattered among the trees.

Claude was startled, but after the first moment of surprise he began laughing, as if it were a joke.

"Come, sir, none of your horse-grinning at me!" exclaimed the captain, fiercely. "I tell you, you are a fool and in my power—I am a gentleman of the road. Your money or your life!"

'Morbleu!—and is it possible you are in earnest?" said Claude, with imperturbable serenity.

"Never more so," returned the captain. "I don't

want to redden a bullet in you if I can help it, but you must be quick and make your election."

"Never fear," replied Claude, with unruffled composure. "Do your worst—fire away!—the pistols are not loaded. Do you think I was so young as to trust a gentleman of your appearance and conversation? I did but tempt you to discover your real character—and here it is!—the balls are drawn."

The captain glanced for a moment at Duval, with a mixture of doubt and fear in his villanous eye, still levelling the pistols; but the unalterable coolness of Claude's manner produced its effect. He burst into a laugh, and quietly poking the pistols back into the holsters, exclaimed, "Egad, a young fellow of infinite courage! Loord help us! and did you really think me in earnest, companion?"

"Faith, and I should have found you in earnest too, had I not been of better nerve than thou art, villain," said Duval, clutching his pistols eagerly. "I see thou art one of those dastardly murderers that do entrap men to their ruin with caresses, like that Judas who is your patron fiend. The pistols *are* loaded, and for a proof here is a ball through your hat; the next shall be hrough your head, if

you refuse in your turn to surrender that goodly red purse, which I will bestow in charity."

Suiting the action to the word, he fired, and was somewhat surprised, knowing that he had only carried off Oates's ragged feather, to see him fall to the ground, as if shot dead. After pacifying his restive horse, which began rearing and nearly threw little Mervyn, Claude turned to the fallen highwayman, and giving him an energetic kick, called upon him to rise. The wretch, however, had the beetle's instinct, and feigned to be either dead or insensible.

For a moment, Claude hesitated as to the propriety of effectually disabling him from further wickedness; but a natural aversion to violence, and even loathing of the treacherous villain, determined him to spare his life. Convinced, however, that he had no rightful claim to the property in his possession, Claude ransacked his pockets with great diligence, He found some gold and jewels of considerable value in his breast, and the red purse; there was also a long knife, and a knotted handkerchief stained with blood, which Claude had no doubt, had recently done yeoman's service. He also found a leaf torn out of an old London Gazette in which he read an exact description of the captain's person,

and a reward of twenty guineas offered for his apprehension, on a charge of swindling some tradesmen.

Claude very kindly left him this certificate of respectability, and mused for some moments, as to what he should do with his captive. He finally determined on tying him hands and feet, and leaving him to the compassion of any good Samaritan, who might be tempted by the reward to take him into custody—a plan which was no sooner thought of than adopted—infinitely to little Mervyn's amusement.

The captain only groaned once as Claude kicked him over. Then having broken the flints of Oates's pistols, thrown them into a ditch, and let his Rosinante loose to feed on the rank grass, Claude remounted, and galloped off at a good speed.

The sunset was rapidly fading into a bright silvery night, when Claude entered the ancient Flemish city. The toils of the day were over, and a gay population filled the streets. It was the glittering era of the grand monarque, and besides, it was evidently a *fête*-day in Saint Omer. There were bonfires in the streets, the shrines were decorated with flowers and lamps; short petticoats and gaudy

caps appeared on lightsome forms at every turn; blue and red stockings were the only wear. The peasant-girls' wooden clogs were painted all sorts of pretty colours, and their smart garters hung roguishly down to their ankles. Dancing was going on in every open space, and Claude heard no sounds but those of music and laughter.

Inquiring of one of the merrimakers the way to the Jesuits' college, he was readily directed, and shortly found himself in front of the antique and massive edifice—the forge of the Romish church's chief thunderbolts in that day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JESUITS.

THE Jesuits seemed to share the public hilarity of the day, for their convent gates were open, and the good brothers were engaged in distributing wine, cakes, and curdled milk to all who chose to partake—not to mention sprigs of holy rosemary, good against charms, storms, and the headach, they having been blessed by the sovereign pontiff himself.

Duval inquired of a giri, who was arranging her hair after the dance, for the Reverend General de Oliva, who he had heard was on a visitation to the college. The girl pointed to a chestnut-tree of extraordinary luxuriance, just before the college gates,

whose foliage, tinged with the scarlet-brown hues of autumn, formed a sort of hanging tent almost to the ground. Beneath this was a bench of twisted branches, and a rustic table spread with fruit and wine, at which sat an old but still vigorous man, in the Jesuit garb, and several gentlemen of the province—probably of high rank, from the richness of their dress.

The general himself wore a purple cross woven in his habit, and a rosary of golden beads. His features, though somewhat harsh and saturnine by nature, were subdued almost to beauty, by a mild and noble expression of genius and goodness. There were times indeed, when an indescribable something in the eye, a peculiar tone of the voice, or an unguarded gesture, showed that it was not apathy, but subdued passions, which gave him that gracious serenity. At this moment, however, the padre seemed absorbed in enjoyment of the merry scene before him, smiling and bestowing his blessing on the happy peasants as they crowded to offer him nosegays of sweet flowers and reverential homage.—Among these sprightly masses Claude Duval made his way very deftly, elbowing the men, and handing the girls aside.

"What man is this, or rather what peacock?" said the general, turning with a smile to his companions.

"From his flaunting livery he should be of Provence, where the hot sun makes them dote on rich colours," said one of the addressed. "But methinks he is courteous as a new noble shuffling his way to the throne through men whose patents date from Charlemagne."

"And mine dates earlier, monsieur," said Claude, bowing reverently. "The Duvals came in with Rollo, and though our family is somewhat reduced, we still keep our pretensions to half Calvados, with absolute possession of some seven acres. Most reverend father, your blessing on this little traveller and myself." And he knelt at the general's feet.

"Who and what art thou, son, that thy introduction is so brief?" said the Jesuit. "And above all, what fair child is this?"

"My name is Claude Duval, servant of the most noble Lord Aumerle," replied the traveller. "The child is—is one whom Providence and his unhappy father commend to your holy protection."

"How—Lord Aumerle! Explain yourself, son!"

said the Jesuit, with a keen and almost startled glance at the boy.

"I cannot before witnesses, even so noble as these Flemish gentlemen," replied Claude. "Messieurs, excuse me; every thing I say or do is trammelled with an oath. But that your reverend lordship may not suspect my intelligence of no worth, I would whisper a word in your ear."

This word, whatever it was, seemed to produce a cabalistical effect. The general entreated his guests to pardon him, and rose as if to retire; but one of the principal among them stopped him. "Nay, father, we will dance awhile with these pretty rustics," he said. "We know the importance of news from England at this juncture; and afterwards, if it please you, I would fain interrogate the gentleman, upon the fearful fire which has made London a heap of ashes."

Claude bowed, and after a slight remonstrance from de Oliva, the gentlemen retired, and mingled with the rural dancers, among whom their glittering garbs and superior elegance seemed the only distinctions they assumed.

"And now thy business ?—from the earl ? is he

still in the Tower ?" exclaimed the Jesuit, eagerly. "Alas! how the world changes! He was of my best-loved friends."

"To begin then, my lord, I have lost all my credentials, papers, jewels, documents—I know not what—from my master to your reverend lordship," said Claude.

"A brief confession—how and when ?" said de Oliva, a shade of suspicion crossing his brow.

"At the great fire," said Claude. "But it will take me some good half-hour to explain all fully, when I shall not appear blamable in your lordship's sight. Meanwhile do you receive no assurance from the child's aspect ?"

"Is this, then, the young disinherited, Aumerle's doubtful son, whom his last letters taught me to expect ?" said the Jesuit, anxiously.

"Look on him, sir! doth not the grape flavour of the vine ?"

"Certes, he much resembles my unhappy friend —but your story ?" said de Oliva, extending his hand to the child. "Come hither, son! Alas! but his beauty partakes much of his bad mother's most exquisite perfection. Well, your story?"

"Beseech you, pardon if I first moisten my dust-choked lungs in a goblet of wine," said Claude, very coolly filling himself a tankard.

The padre assented with a smile, and Claude swallowed a hearty draught, taking care to leave a few bright drops for Mervyn, who seemed to taste it with infinite relish. He then began, as he had promised, with a circumstantial narrative of those particulars with which the reader is acquainted, from his interview with Aumerle in the Tower to his arrival at Calais. But he did not seem to think it necessary to mention his recent affair with the highwayman.

The Jesuit listened with deep attention, casting frequent glances of compassion at Mervyn; and when Claude concluded his narrative, the general sat for some minutes in revery; then smoothening the boy's fair locks, he sighed deeply.

"Your tale needs no vouchers, Duval," he said, at last. "But the loss of all those precious documents—and in such hands—is indeed grievous. What if the infuriate parliament and populace should glut themselves in the earl's blood—no proof, no testimonies remain in our hands."

"It shall be remedied when I return to my lord; which I purpose instantly, if your reverence accept the charge I have brought," said Claude.

"I do, as if directly tendered me by Heaven!" said the Jesuit. "God have mercy on that cruel woman! I did ever warn the earl that—methinks I may trust thee, Claude?"

"With any thing but a pretty girl," said Claude.

"Or a goblet of wine," added the Jesuit, smiling thoughtfully. "Well, it matters not—yet methinks this whole affair is stranger than aught that ever I saw or read, though in my young days I was fond of the wild romances of this besotted age. You are bound to secrecy, Claude?"

"By so many oaths that purgatory would be too good for me if I broke one," said the traveller.

"I married them at Bruges, during the king's exile; and what a change is this!" continued the padre, musingly. "Poor Aumerle!—and for such a profligate flaunter and midnight wassailer as Howard was thy noble heart betrayed!"

"And my answer to his lordship?" said Claude, earnestly.

"The earl desired me to return only verbal answers to his messages," replied de Oliva. "The

care which he commits to me and to my holy order is indeed fraught with awful responsibility. Tell him, I accept it with fear and trembling. Assure him, in my name, that all his desires shall be fulfilled to the very letter. I would fain write him a few words of consolation, but that I perceive it may compromise him with his bloodthirsty enemies if he is discovered in secret correspondence with a poor servant of the church."

"Your reverend lordship promises then never by word or deed to give this young child any inkling of his true quality and birth, unless desired by the earl himself?"

"So may Heaven help me in my need!" said the padre, solemnly. "I much fear, Claude, that the time is nigh when the knowledge of either would only prove the poor orphan's ruin."

"Alas! my lord, and I do grievously fear the same," said Duval. "However that may be, and though I have lost the moneys which my lord sent to you for charitable purposes, I doubt not to return with such documents as shall convince you that I am in no way an impostor."

"I do not suspect thee, friend," said de Oliva, with a smile. "And in fine I accept your charge,

so now you may join these revellers awhile, for I see you are a jovial companion."

Duval reverently thanked the general, and was going to leave the boy with his new protector, while he joined the merry company on the green. But Mervyn leaped upon his neck, and clung to him with loud screams. The padre arose and tried for some moments to soothe him with promises and caresses, but the child was not to be pacified, and seemed rather terrified than allured by the Jesuit's foreign-sounding English, though couched in such soft phrase as "dear leetle boy!—chiquito de mis entrañas!"

"Well, take him with you—he will weary anon," said he, at last. "He has a character at least—here are two traits—obstinacy and affection. When his little lids begin to droop, return with him to the college; we are not much used to the management of such nursery-scholars, but old Ambrose, a lay-brother, will readily take charge of him."

Claude withdrew with a lightened heart to join the revellers, among whom he soon established himself as a general favourite. Independently of his splendid livery, dashing manners, and devil-may-care style of conversation, he danced to admira-

tion, gossiped with the old women, and talked soft nonsense with the young. His presence revived the festival, which was beginning to flag, and a moonlight of surpassing brilliancy had supplied the place of the sun. Jokes were cracked, healths drunk, songs sung, and merry games played, till old and young were all alive with gaiety. The favourite but now antiquated sport—the beloved revelry of the Norman peasantry, and of old England too, before misery and manufactures had worn the life-blood out of her hearty and gallant commons—Kiss in the Ring—was proposed by Claude, and carried by acclamation of the young men, and faint "nays" from the tittering lasses. And a mirthful sight it was to see them all standing in a vast ring, maid and bachelor, blooming and blushing and giggling, like grown-up fairies, beneath the sweet moonlight and chequered shade of the venerable trees. The picturesque peasant dress of the period; the particoloured petticoat, little roguish bodice, and gaudy caps of the women; the gay nether garments of the men, their long dangling garters, and crimson sack caps, made as pretty a grouping as the most expert ballet-master could contrive.

The good fathers of the convent (for so they were

considered by the people of Saint Omer, whatever the affrighted puritans of England and the Jansenists of France might hold them) looked on with encouragement and even pleasure; men whose pens were foremost in the fierce controversies of the time, and whose persons were engaged in its most perilous intrigues, seemed to refresh their study-worn souls with this exhibition of natural and hearty feeling. At the same time their presence produced a salutary effect, in restraining any tendency to intemperance or quarrel, to which indeed the phlegmatic people of Flanders were but little addicted.

De Oliva himself remarked with a smile that Duval obtained by far the greatest number of crowns, to the vexation of his compeers; but his perpetual good-nature, and evident courage, kept him clear of downright quarrels. The Jesuit observed also, but with deeper attention, the young boy who had been so singularly intrusted to his charge. To his surprise Mervyn, young as he was, seemed bent on sharing all the jollities and pranks afoot, imitating Duval with a fidelity astonishing in one so green of years. He danced, ran about kissing the little peasant girls, sipped wine, and made the old men shake with laughter at the gallant style in which he sang a

little English song. But at last the urchin fell asleep in the arms of an old woman, whom he persisted in calling "nurse Alice," and de Oliva ordered her to take the child into the college, and deliver it to the care of the lay-brother appointed to the office. The great bell of the convent soon after tolled, and the good meeting was broken up.

Claude found a straw pallet prepared for him near another for Mervyn, in an apartment plainly but substantially furnished. Relieved of the heavy responsibility which had pressed upon him, he cheerfully commended himself to the Virgin, and was soon in a deep slumber.

In the morning, Mervyn was sent for to breakfast with the padre himself, while Claude was handed over to the care of the lay-brothers in the refectory. These personages appeared in some little commotion, and Claude learned that the movement was caused by the return of Van Huysman, rector of the college, a man of great severity in discipline. He had been in England, superintending some affairs of the order; but as he travelled in the apostolic fashion, with scrip and sandals, the community were kept on the alert as to his return.

Claude was earnestly engaged with his bread and

fruit, when a brother arrived to summon him to the general's presence. On entering the apartment, his eye was directed on the newly-arrived rector. His figure was remarkable for its great height, and the majestic shape of his shoulders and head, but he was lean and bony to the last degree. His face seemed macerated by constant fasting, but the expression was large, severe, and commanding, especially when his sunken eye lighted up as it was wont when earnestly engaged. An habitual stoop, caused by weakness or constant study, somewhat detracted from his stature, but gave a kind of devout meekness to the natural austerity of his figure.

A glance around convinced Claude that something momentous had occurred. The padre looked pale, and his lip quivered with nervous agitation; the rector himself seemed troubled; only little Mervyn was quite at his ease, supping bread and milk. The padre's first words were ominous.

"It is unnecessary for you to hurry yourself, Duval, on your return to England," he said. "My friend, and your unfortunate lord, is no more; he committed suicide in the Tower on the night of the fire."

Claude stood for a moment thunderstruck, and

then exclaiming: "Holy saints!—I dreaded this!—my lord is murdered!" sank sobbing into a chair.

"Heaven only knows," said the Jesuit, crossing himself. "But vengeance is His, and He will repay!"

"But is this certain? or is it but a tale afloat among the mad rumours of the day?" exclaimed Claude.

"Young man, it is but too true," said Van Huysman, in his calm measured tone. "A jury sat on the earl's body the evening after, but in such confusion and tremors, on account of the still raging flames, that little was done. The jury indeed complained of the scantiness and perplexity of the evidence, but they hastily returned a verdict of felo de se. And so the earl your master was buried, as I myself saw, in a rude grave dug in the Tower ditch—uncoffined, with his cloak for a shroud."

Claude fairly wept at this dismal recital, and hiding his face in his hands, sobbed for several minutes like a child. Mervyn, unconscious of the share which he himself had in that grief, ran and threw his arms around Claude's neck, and cried for company. A few drops forced themselves to Oliva's eyes too, but the rector looked on with stoical composure—almost with contempt.

As Claude still persisted that the earl's prediction had come true—that he was murdered and called a suicide—the Jesuits, though they said nothing to Duval, exchanged looks which spoke their conviction that the prophecy had a foregone conclusion. But when Claude minutely related his adventures with Blood—the interview in the Tower—and the fierce pursuit he kept up, as if anxious to destroy witnesses whose evidence was so dangerous—Oliva was once more staggered. Van Huysman, however, coldly remarked, that the very circumstance of Blood's nocturnal chase proved an alibi at least in his favour. Still Claude persisted in his belief that this man had murdered his lord, most probably in the time which had elapsed between his rescue by Edwards, and meeting with him again in St. Paul's Churchyard.

"We will examine what cohesion there may be in your account, with the circumstances that appeared on the quest," said Van Huysman. "Here is a copy of the proceedings, extracted from the London Gazetteer. It is short and timid, but not without significance."

The Jesuit produced a paper printed on a small sheet, in very brown type, and handed it to Claude.

The latter, after a glance at Mervyn, who was looking on in innocent wonder, and receiving a nod from Oliva, read the article aloud. It was headed: "Horrid Self-murder of a Popish Lord in the Tower, on the Night of the Outbursting of the Fire," and proceeded in the following style:

"The monstrous consequences which flow from a devilish religion (or rather atheistical pantheism), were fully and most horridly shown in the dismal discovery which was made yesterday morning, about four o'clock, A. M., of a bloody self-murder executed by the Popish Earl d'Aumerle on his own person." Then followed a long tirade against the Pope and all the cardinals, who were designated as Antichrist and his devils; against the council of Trent; an eulogium on Luther; and finally, by no very perceptible connexion, a brief narrative of the earl's commitment to the Tower. The certainty of his guilt in the matter of the Irish rebellion, was strongly dwelt on, and his melancholy and desperate expressions on that occasion were noted. Then it was ambiguously hinted that he was aware of the plot of the Jesuits to burn the city, and it was concluded that the audience which he solicited of his majesty, was for the purpose of revealing that dreadful mys-

tery. But the fire breaking out before the king could be prevailed upon to see him, it was generously left to the consideration of the public, whether remorse, or disappointment at the partial failure of that most dismal plot, had suddenly driven the earl on to his suicide. The Gazetteer professed itself unable to determine, and proceeded to lay the evidence before its readers.

The principal evidence was that of Talbot Edwards, keeper of the regalia. He stated that he served the earl at his supper, and aided to undress him, about half-past ten. That he left him in bed, but as he went out of the antechamber, heard the earl get up and draw the inner bolt. That he himself very carefully locked and secured the three doors leading to the stone stairs of the Bloody Tower, and delivered the keys to the lieutenant. That to oblige one of the warders, who was on watch at the foot of the stairs, and who was afraid of ghosts, he brought his supper there, and ate it with him. That they had a beef pasty and three hoops of strong ale; that afterwards, feeling sleepy, they agreed to watch, turn about, but he did on his troth believe they were once both asleep at the same time. That, however, about a quarter before twelve at night, he was

awakened by a loud report or bang, which seemed to him like the falling of a door, or of some portion of the building. That the warder and he were greatly frightened, and thought to go to the lieutenant and relate what they had heard; but that they were securely fastened in the tower, as was usual. That after listening for some time, and hearing no farther disturbance, they went up the staircase, and knocked at the outer door, calling on the earl. That while there, they heard two deep, and, as they thought, choked groans, followed by extreme silence; but on making a great uproar at the door, and calling out, "My lord, doth aught ail ye?" a voice, which they took to be the earl's, answered, and said that he was well, only some timbers had fallen in the courtyard. That thereupon they retired, and spent the remainder of the night very wretchedly; thinking it was some spectral sound; that as soon as the watch was relieved, they went to Master Lieutenant and told him what they had heard: who thereupon was much troubled, and came hastily back with them. That they found all the doors firmly locked on the outside, as on the night before, and the earl's bedroom door still fastened on the inside. That having received no answer to repeated calls, Master Lieute-

nant directed them to break open the door; and that entering, they found the earl dead in his bed, with a deep wound on his left side, and a pistol, with a spring dagger, lying on the floor. The only additional evidence was that of Sir John Robinson, who merely proved the finding of the body, and the impossibility of any one having had access to the apartment. The only suspicious circumstance was, that a piece of torn paper, and, some reported, a lock of coarse hair, were found clutched in the dead man's hands.

To all this strong and apparently conclusive statement, Claude had little to object. He saw that both the Jesuits were convinced that the earl had, in the agony of his feelings, and perhaps stumbling on the instrument at some opportune moment of desperation, committed suicide. He too was staggered by its coherency, but he protested that he would return to England, and dedicate the rest of his life to discovering and punishing the murderers.

"It were matter of notable peril for you to attempt," replied Van Huysman. "This same Gazetteer contains an offer of three hundred guineas for your apprehension."

"For my apprehension!" exclaimed Claude.

"You are accused of robbery and Scandalum Magnatum," replied the Jesuit, sternly. "Of robbery, in having stolen your master's jewels of the garter, and certain sums of money; and of the still graver offence, of giving out that a child, supposed to be your own, is the lawful heir of the titles and estates of the Earl d'Aumerle; and this suit is instituted on behalf of his late lordship's wife, now countess in her own right."

"I did tell your reverend lordship how I lost the jewels. 'Tis a foul conspiracy!" exclaimed Claude, vehemently; "and that this child is my lord's sole and lawful heir, I will maintain with my dagger, in the throat of whoso denies it, be he king or beggar!"

"I have some private reason to put faith in your story, Duval," said the padre, gently. "But we are destitute of all proof, of all evidence, either of his birth, or of his father's acknowledgment, and this wicked woman, his mother, has every engine of oppression at command. At present our sole endeavour must be to keep his existence a secret. If the earl's death occurred as you suppose, they who have imbrued their hands in his father's blood would fain wash away the stain in his. We must go to work

cautiously; we have emissaries in England who will make such inquiries as are meet. Meanwhile, this child is under my protection, whatever happens."

Claude bowed, but his heart was too full to speak.

"And now, brother," said the General, turning to Van Huysman, "you said you had something to relate of your own mishaps?"

"Rather my good fortunes, father," replied Van Huysman, "since I arrived in time to succour a Christian in distress."

CHAPTER X.

THE TABLES TURNED.

CLAUDE'S attention, which was somewhat excited by the observation concluding the last chapter, was fixed when he heard the Jesuit relate how, passing through the forest of Clairvaux, he had lighted on a man bound hand and foot, and severely ill-treated by robbers. He had freed him, and engaged some labourers to bring him to the college, where he expected him every moment. He added, with a smile, that his Samaritan propensities were quickened by a mishap which had befallen himself, for that he was robbed and almost murdered by some highwaymen in a wood, near Calais, the day before.

Claude was somewhat confused on hearing this tale, and on finding that the assertions of Captain Oates (for he doubted little it was that worthy) were all taken for granted. It also occurred to him that from circumstances, it would be extremely difficult to disprove any charge which his late opponent chose to make. He strove, however, to put on an appearance of carelessness, as he asked the particulars of the encounter, hesitating in his own mind as to whether he should relate what he himself knew of the matter. But the equivocal light in which he was conscious his character now appeared, and his doubts as to the opinion which those reverend men might have on the propriety of robbing even a robber, restrained him. At all events he determined that he would avow nothing until the necessity became evident. Perhaps, after all, the person found might not be Oates, and to certify himself on this particular, he asked and gained permission to retire.

Claude, on leaving the college, having observed a blacksmith's forge near the gates of St. Omer, through which the victim must enter, led his horse there to have him shod. There was as usual a considerable throng of boors and townsfolk assembled in the black stithy, and Claude found that the conver-

sation was concerning the recent robbery, and father Van Huysman's humanity. The forge was open on all sides, and Claude stood slightly apart, while the huge brawny-armed Vulcan performed his task. He soon, however, found that he was, for some reason or other, an object of general dislike or distrust. The men whispered one another, and looked at him with inauspicious eyes. The centre of this general sensation was a stumpy little man, who seemed actively engaged in exchanging suspicions with his neighbours.

Claude bore this for some time, till finding that the matter did not mend, "Why, how now, my masters," he said, "what is this? You seem afraid of me, as if I had the plague in my doublet; what mean ye?"

No answer was returned to this question for some minutes; the men hustled up together, and even the smith dropped his hammer to look up with expectation. All eyes were turned towards the old man, who looked embarrassed with the responsibility thus cast upon him.

"Monsieur," he said, at last, with evident reluctance, "Excuse us; but you are not, as I think, much known in these parts?"

"'Tis very true, and I care not an I were less," replied Claude. "But why do you make the remark?"

"Because—because," muttered the peasant, "I—I am the syndic of the town gates, and—and—"

There was another solemn silence.

"And what have I to do with the syndic of the town gates, except to wish it may be long ere the keys cease to grace your worship's belt?" said Claude.

"Have you a passport, master stranger?" said a burly looking man, whose garb proclaimed him one of the syndic's porters.

"When I learn by what right you demand to know, I shall be more ready to inform you," said Claude.

"I, sir! I am the syndic," replied the old man, bristling up with importance.

"I showed my letters to the padre, when I entered the town yesterday, and I do not think it necessary to repeat the operation," said Claude, sharply.

"Say you so, say you so, my master?" replied the syndic. "Then by St. Bertin! we shall find means to make you. My life against a button, gen-

tlemen, this fellow is the very man, Claude Duval, as he calls himself."

"Troth you are right enough: my mother gave me no reason to be ashamed of the name," said Duval.

An exclamation of surprise, and even fear, burst from the crowd. The smith ceased his work altogether, those who had swords laid hand on the hilts, and the rest seized such weapons as chance presented, as if against some ferocious animal. Claude was infinitely puzzled, but could not refrain from laughing at this sudden panic.

"Ay, laugh away, laugh away! you will grin in another guise when the axe is on your neck," exclaimed the syndic, suffering himself to be elbowed out of his prominent position. "Gentlemen, seize him in the emperor's name and the good town's; he is a robber—he confesses to the name—and his outward presentments are exactly answerable. Seize him."

"Who dares is weary of the world!" exclaimed Claude, fiercely. "But what in all the saints' names, has put this madness into your empty skulls?"

"Here comes one who will explain, good faith,"

said the syndic, pointing to a mass of moving objects advancing on the road.

Claude had no difficulty in making out what was meant, when he recognised, amidst a confused mob of peasants, a squat figure on a raw-boned horse, which he seemed to sit with difficulty, bending forward in a very ludicrous position. Claude perceived that this personage was relating some story, in a raised and much excited tone, exhibiting to the rabble, by way of illustration, his wrists and ankles, which were marked in red rings. The broad tones and vile French in which this individual was addressing his conductors, for it seemed he could speak it when he chose, and the deception he was practising, moved Claude irresistibly to laughter, in spite of the danger in which he stood. Oates's eye was instantly attracted by the unexpected sound, and uttering a shrill cry, he crouched down to his horse's neck, screaming, "Good people, good people, seize him! that is the murderous thief who maltreated me! seize him." And as if overcome by terror, he slided off his raw-boned steed to the ground, where he lay kicking and screaming.

"Seize him in the emperor's name," shouted the

syndic, rushing out of pistol range. "Au voleur! au voleur!"

Some of the boldest of the rabble, repeating this cry, as hunters halloo to the dogs, rushed on Duval. At first the good Norman began protesting his innocence, and accusing Oates of his villany; but his voice was overpowered in the uproar. Finding there was no chance of fair play from the mob, Claude, resolving to force his way out of their clutches, drew his sword. This movement sent them rolling one over another in great confusion; but they were rallied instantly by the ponderous porter, who struck Claude a stunning blow with his cudgel on the sword arm. In a moment the mob rushed upon him like waves of the sea, and he was fairly overpowered and forced down.

Oates, observing the success of his allies, now rushed into the mêlée, and screaming, "My purse, my purse, villain!" knelt on Claude's chest, and tore open his doublet. The next moment the purse waved triumphantly over Oates's head, aud changing his cry into, "My joals, my joals, monster!" he continued his search; but Claude was now roused to desperation, and exerting all his strength, he dashed Oates to the ground with terrible violence.

The mob thought their prisoner secure, and the suddenness of the onset dismayed them. Claude struck around him with his pistols, his sword being broken, and he quickly cleared a way to the spot where his horse was standing, with the tawny blacksmith beside it, staring dumb with amazement. To spring into the saddle and dash out on the road, was the work of a moment, and simultaneously Claude perceived some mounted gendarmes galloping out of St. Omer, shouting, "Au voleur!" Flight was now his sole resource, for he had little doubt he should be cut down before he could make any explanation, and he set off at a rate which soon left pursuit far behind.

His panic, however, served instead of the gendarmerie, and Claude continued at the same speed until his horse, strong as it was, showed symptoms of exhaustion. Covered with foam, and the sweat streaming from its flanks, the spur itself had lost the power of urging it; and Claude, finding that he was crossing a large tract of unenclosed country, and being satisfied that pursuit was over, allowed the animal to take its own pace. He had now leisure for thought, and his meditations were by no means pleasant.

He knew that he was on the direct road to Paris, and that in three hours he had left Saint Omer nearly twenty miles behind him. The general belief which Oates's tale had obtained, and the seeming proofs which supported it, made it impossible to return. On the other hand, his disappearance would confirm all that had been alleged against him. Besides, he had still in his possession, as he thought, the bank bill which he was to have delivered. On rummaging his pockets, however, he found that it was gone, and very likely into Oates's hands when he rifled him.

Under these circumstances, it seemed madness to return, and when Claude ruminated on how he had fulfilled his promise to the letter—that his lord was dead, and his child's cause hopeless—he determined to continue his route to Paris, and thence write a full explanation of his conduct to the padre, and await his instructions. But to effect even this was not without difficulty, for he was aware that the whole country must soon be in a hue and cry, and that his torn dress and the exhausted condition of his horse must necessarily raise suspicion. He determined, therefore, to conceal himself till nightfall in a forest which stretched to his right.

From this resolution he was diverted by a new circumstance. As he approached the forest a wild boar rushed out, pursued by a full cry of huntsmen and hounds, whose horses and gear were in not much better plight than his own; and the thought struck him that he would ride to a village which he saw down in a ravine of the forest, and represent himself as one of the hunters, worn and ragged with the day's sport. This idea no sooner occurred than he adopted it, and walking beside his spent steed down a very steep road, he found himself, to his great joy, before an inn, bearing the appropriate sign of the "Golden Cross of Mercy."

Meanwhile Oates, though stretched bleeding and senseless on the floor of the smithy, remained master of the field. He was raised with the greatest tenderness, and agreeably to former orders, carried to the Jesuits' college. The whole story was at first heard with incredulity by Oliva. But Van Huysman took the opposite side, less from any partiality to the personage whose life he had saved, than from the natural severity of his temper, and the ill opinion which he had of mankind in general. He took the care of Oates on himself, having studied medicine, as a relaxation from theology; bled him, washed his

many bruises with an embrocation, and ordered him to remain quiet, although he testified a great desire to speak—especially when he heard that Duval had escaped all pursuit, the gendarmes returning completely exhausted.

On removing the purse, which Oates continued to grasp convulsively, Van Huysman instantly recognised it as that which had been taken from him by robbers in the wood near Calais. Learning, however, that it had been torn from Claude, he concluded that Oates had mistaken it for his own—an opinion which that gentleman took no care to impugn when he understood how the case stood.

Every thing was against Claude. Although the men who had robbed him were in black masks, Van Huysman recollected that one of them resembled Claude in height and figure. Little Mervyn's childish innocence made it impossible to gather any confirmation from him, and even Oliva began to incline to the painful belief, that Claude was indeed the assassin he was represented. This opinion threw a shadow of doubt on his whole story, which was deepened into conviction when his prolonged absence and silence left no other interpretation of his conduct.

Meanwhile Oates recovered fast under the care of

Van Huysman, whose severe stoicism of temper and manners nevertheless made even his charity repulsive. Oates, who had neither principles nor talents, managed to conceal the want of both by the low cunning which was his characteristic. For some time he kept absolute silence on the circumstances which had occurred between him and Duval, under pretext of extreme weakness. He however listened to all accounts; questioned on such points as were not sufficiently clear;—and at length, when the general judged him well enough to answer his inquiries, he was prepared with a tale so admirably well concocted, that it was hardly possible to suspect its truth.

The hints which Oates had gathered concerning Mervyn, furnished him with the groundwork. He alleged that he had met with Claude in the forest of Clairvaux, that they had dined and drunk together, and that the former, excited by wine, confessed that he had a plan afoot to deceive the fathers of St. Omer, and even gloried in it. This plan, according to Oates, was nothing less than to thrust a base child of his own upon the fathers, under pretext that it was the son of an English nobleman,

confined in the Tower; an audacious calumny, which seemed supported by many circumstances.

On the whole, the balance of evidence inclined strongly against Claude. Still the General withheld his decision until some tidings should come from the accused, and he still hoped that those tidings would contain his justification. But when no intelligence whatever arrived, and several days past, the padre found his suspicions ripening into certainty. Still he was puzzled by the great resemblance between Mervyn and the late earl, his alleged father, whom he had known well in former times. Unluckily it occurred to him to explain this resemblance in a manner which chimed in with the general taste. Although Lord Aumerle had never been a man of intrigue, the padre knew not what influence the dissolute manners of the restored court might have exercised upon him. He thought it possible that this child might be the fruit of some secret amour, of which Claude bore the public blame. In short, he knew not what to think with any certainty, and finding that Oates knew nothing of the name of the Lord Aumerle in connexion with the affair, he ordered all matters pertaining to it to be kept a pro-

found secret; and Van Huysman being his only confidant, it was impossible for Oates, with all his cunning, to fathom the affair.

Doubtful as he was, or rather convinced that a deception had been played upon him, the General resolved to continue his protection to little Mervyn. The beauty, sweet temper, and talent of the child, and his very helplessness, moved the padre's benevolent spirit, and he determined, in case of the worst, to adopt the boy, and bring him up to the holy ministry which he himself exercised; and the first faint traits of character in his childish nature were such as to give great hopes, to him who would undertake to bring those early blossoms to fruit. In the mean time Oates recovered thoroughly from the treatment he had received, and there remained no longer a pretext for his remaining in the college. He had given out that he was going to Paris, to solicit service in the Dutch war; but he delayed his departure under various pretexts, the chief of which was a pretended desire to become a catholic; for he purposely owned his heretic education.

Van Huysman was pleased with this chance of making a convert; but on inquiry he found so much ignorance, presumption, and even infidelity, under

the hypocritical gloss with which Oates covered his real character, that he frankly owned to Oliva he had rather such a man remained a heretic.

Oates's real object was, however, to worm out the core of the mystery which seemed to envelop young Mervyn. But in this he was baffled; for his utmost diligence could only ascertain the fact of a large reward being offered in England for Claude's capture; but by whom or for what he could by no means learn.

It became necessary at length to take his departure, for divers rumours came to Oates's ear, which seemed to render that part of the country an uneasy residence for him. He feared in particular that some one might arrive from England who would recognise him, especially as the college was then a sort of head-quarters of the persecuted English catholics. On the whole, though by no means tired of the hospitality of the good fathers, he judged it expedient to leave the scene. He was still lingering, however, in the hope of hearing something about Claude, to direct him in his future inquiries, when news arrived, but not precisely of the sort which the captain desired. Claude wrote to the padre from Paris, where he stated himself to remain in great destitution; and

after giving a brief but energetic account of the circumstances which had forced his abrupt departure from Saint Omer, and accusing Oates of the robbery, he concluded by stating that he had hired himself as a groom in the train of Rouvigny, the French ambassador to England, who was about to proceed thither. When there, he said, he would make such inquiries as would set his own character in its true light, and ascertain the possibility of re-instating the young heir in his rights.

It was not difficult for Oates, by protestations and assertions, to throw an air of improbability on this narrative, more especially as the Jesuits ascertained about this time that the earl's bill had been presented and paid at Paris, by one who professed to be their agent. At the same time he declared his resolution of proceeding instantly to Paris, to find out this vile calumniator, and bring him to justice. In fact, having now caught scent of his intended victim, he was ready enough to depart. The padre, however, engaged him, if he learned any thing certain about Claude, to communicate with him before he took any proceedings against him, and lent him a sum of money to purchase a horse and accoutrements, and so he departed one fine morning for

Paris,—first bidding the Jesuits a most grateful farewell, and bathing Van Huysman's hand with tears, as he protested that his life and all he had should henceforth be held as his boon.

The weasel was now fairly on the track of the hare, and as that persevering hunter, however outrun in the start, never fails eventually to come up with its victim, so fared it with Claude and his pursuer. On arriving at Paris, the worthy captain found, to his great grief, that the ambassador and all his train had departed for England. He ascertained, nevertheless, that a person answering the description of Claude, was in his suite, and, finding no better could be done, as he dared not venture his own valuable person in England, he wrote to one whom he thought very likely to interest himself in the matter—Colonel Blood.

The next news, accordingly, which the Jesuits heard of Claude Duval was, that he was arrested and accused of the robbery of his late lord. The charge of Scandalum Magnatum was dropped, on Claude's making oath that the child in question was his own, and that it had perished on the night of the great fire, by the sinking of the boat as they past under the burning bridge of London. Not

satisfied even with this, the countess directed a letter to be read in court from her late husband, shortly after the birth of this pretended Reginald, Lord Mervyn, certifying his decease.

The ambassador made a slight stir about the arrest of one of his servants, but he waived his privilege on ascertaining the felonious nature of the charges against him. And thus poor Claude was apparently abandoned to the rage of his enemies, and Oliva heard, without surprise, that he was condemned to the galleys for life. Shortly after, however, he effected his escape, and was not again heard of until he emerged in that character which has rendered his name the representative of all that is gallant, polished, and daring in highway robbery.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REAL POPISH PLOT.

Our little hero was now fairly installed at Saint Omer. Oliva was indeed thoroughly persuaded that he had been deceived in all Claude's statements, who, he concluded, had taken advantage of an acquaintance with his master's secrets, to palm the child upon him. Still there was something so engaging in the beauty and vivacity of the little foundling, that the Jesuit's heart was touched with compassion, and he resolved to accept the charge which chance had confided to him.

The padre easily detected veins of fine and rare materials in Mervyn's mind, which he thought might be hewn into a magnificent pillar of the church. It

was a stirring and a stormy period, demanding every resource of genius and courage, when the Catholic power, after ebbing for a hundred years before the furious winds of the Reformation, was slowly and majestically flowing back to the ancient landmarks.

Oliva determined on educating his protégé at St. Omer, and afterwards taking him under his own protection as an adopted child, if his future conduct did not disappoint his expectations. There was, however, some danger of this catastrophe, for with all the sweetness and goodness of his disposition, there was a wildness and impatience of restraint in his character which threatened evil consequences. Van Huysman seemed to think that under the stern discipline of the college, he could crush this rebellious buoyancy of nature. The padre took care not to contradict him, whatever he might think of the matter; and as he himself shortly after returned to Rome, Van Huysman had ample opportunities of putting his ideas in practice.

Before he left St. Omer, Oliva gave strict instructions that the circumstances attending Mervyn's arrival should be kept secret, above all, from the youth himself. He wished him neither to obtain any inklings of Claude's romantic story of his birth, which

might give him unfounded hopes and expectations; nor, on the other hand, to know the ignominy of what the padre concluded to be the truth; especially as Claude Duval's name had now become notorious in England for several daring robberies, and Oliva had little doubt that the scaffold would be his ultimate fate.

The man to whom Mervyn was thus confided was by no means suited to the task assigned him, which required rather a training than a pruning hand. Arnold Van Huysman was a Belgian of noble birth, a man whose natural inflexibility and severity of temper were hardened, not subdued, by the extreme ardour of his religious principles. He carried devotion to the same pitch of imaginative madness as the early ascetics of the African church, in whose hot blood religion became a passion, and belief fanaticism. Convinced of the apostolic truth of the church of which he was a minister, he was ready to endure or to inflict, with equal constancy and unrelenting courage. Insensible to pleasure as to pain, patient, persevering, inflexible in his resolutions, religion was his only enthusiasm, the sole engine which seemed to have power to raise his passions. Severe misfortunes, the ingratitude of

friends, the betrayal of those whom he had loved, had dried up all springs of natural affection in his heart, and soured his temper, though an habitual self-command, and great knowledge of the world, kept its ebullitions under control.

Mervyn was soon initiated in the preliminaries of education, as a pupil of the college, which was then one of the most celebrated seminaries in Europe. Many of the noblest families of France, and nearly all the great Catholic families of England, had their sons educated at St. Omer, which yearly sent forth into the world the most eminent scholars and polished intellects of the age. Men of great learning, and of remarkable sobriety of manners, were its teachers and examples, devoting all their energies to the sublime task of educating a future age. The nearly perfect system of training which that great order matured in silence, and which but for the sudden revolution that dashed it to pieces, might in time have realized the grand vision of Loyola, and restored to the Catholic church her magnificent empire of mind, boundless as time and human existence, was established at St. Omer, in all its noiseless but irresistible power. The manufactory of intellect

went on from day to day, as if of some material stuff, which could be woven to the fancy of the artificer.

The system of the Jesuits nevertheless did not aspire to what so many others have failed in,—to destroy or to choke the natural current of genius or passions in their pupils,—but only to direct them into such channels as they thought expedient and useful to the ends which they had in view. An entire and unreserved obedience to the church in all things, a passionate, and at the same time an argumentative belief in her infallibility, were rigidly taught, and as it were kneaded into the very thinking power itself. On all others but religious points the Jesuits admitted the supremacy of reason, and without directly impugning the sway of authority, they allowed their pupils to canvass the dogmatic philosophy of the times, and subject it to the analysis of experiment. The decrees of Aristotle and of the schoolmen, though still called infallible in their academies, were no longer enforced with the weight of ecclesiastical authority. The abstract and natural sciences were studied with infinite zeal in their colleges. These sciences were indeed cultivated somewhat too exclusively, and seemed intended to reduce

the mind of man to a laborious machine of thought, rather than to inspire it with a creative energy. The flowers of the imagination were rooted up, as if they were weeds that impeded the harvest of solid thought. And here it was that the great rock of their system presented itself; they committed the great fault of forgetting that man has a heart as well as a soul.

The discipline of the convent of St. Omer, though extremely severe, was enforced by Van Huysman with the additional sternness of his character. The commonest actions of existence were regulated by an invisible but iron law, from which no reluctance, no appeal, could obtain exemption. A republican equality and simplicity of diet, dress, and manners, reigned; the only licensed conversation, except in recreation hours, was in Latin, and then always on subjects which called forth the controversial powers of the mind. Nothing frivolous, nothing even merely amusing, was ever permitted; their very sports had a reasonableness in them, which showed that men, and not boys, had planned them.

The garb of the students was exceedingly simple, and no distinction which rank or riches could make, was allowed. It consisted of dark brown cloaks,

crossed-shaped caps, and cassocks of snowy linen; with such slight alterations as the seasons required.

Time past on, and as year after year rolled away, Mervyn's character began to expand in all its beauties and defects, to the watchful eyes of his preceptors. Van Huysman observed its development with close attention, for Oliva continued to exact a particular account of him. It is true, that the interest which the padre had at first taken in his little foundling was somewhat weakened by time and long absence; but he still continued to cherish a kindly recollection of him, mingled with much of that divine feeling which makes us love the thing we have benefited. But the accounts which the rector from time to time forwarded, were not so favourable as the padre had hoped. Van Huysman had often occasion to complain of the boy's impatience under rule, his daring and invincible pride, which no punishment could subdue, and which generally made him the head and front of all acts of insubordination. These achievements, of course, brought punishment on his head, the extreme severity of which, however, seemed only to rouse an indomitable power of endurance, almost of defiance.

Van Huysman, nevertheless, had remarked, not without some doubt of the efficacy of his severe system, that after menaces and chastisement were exhausted in vain, to melt the boy's obstinacy, a few kind words would bring tears into his eyes, and a touch on the point of honour suddenly vanquished all his obstinacy. These were good traits, and the rector, with all his austerity, really loved young Mervyn better than any other of his numerous charge. Indeed it was scarcely possible to avoid distinguishing one so beautiful—for he grew up as his childhood had promised—and withal so finely, though capriciously endowed, that his talents were at once a wonder and a perplexity to his tutors.

But Van Huysman's affection produced an effect which most observers would have supposed to spring from a contrary motive—it increased his watchfulness and severity towards the object of it, and rendered his slightest fault less venial than heavy misdemeanors in the other pupils. No wonder then, that Mervyn, as yet unacquainted with the metaphysics of the heart, mistook his preceptor's feelings, and imagined himself an object of peculiar dislike to him. This again produced a reaction, for Mervyn, who was ever too easily led by those

whom he loved, or who he thought loved him, was inflexible as adamant to the compulsion which he thought injustice.

With all his faults, however, his talents were undoubted, and Van Huysman had long dedicated him in silence to the magnificent cause for which he himself was ready to become a martyr—the restoration of the ancient integrity and dominion of the Roman Church. But this purpose was in some respects likely to be baffled by the natural disposition of Mervyn, which seemed, from its daring and activity, rather fitted to form a great soldier than a distinguished ecclesiastic. And yet the work for which Van Huysman imagined himself forming a labourer, required many of the virtues which, in less stormy times, were deemed rather the characteristics of the killers of men than of the savers of souls. Courage, patience to endure, and daring to inflict, subtlety of intellect, and profound acquaintance with the passions and politics of the time, were among the qualifications required by that bold order, whose colossal design it was to bring back the whole northern world to the footstool of the Roman dominion.

It is true also that Mervyn was not without his

fits of application to studies of a nature suitable to the purpose for which he was intended. He plunged, with the reckless enthusiasm of his character, into the deep ocean of learning to whose shore they conducted him; and if he neither dived deep, nor brought up pearls of value, the exercise served to strengthen the muscles and nerves of his intellect. It seemed to Van Huysman that, even in studying the writings of the fathers of the church, it was rather for the historical and poetical material they yielded, than for their devotional and controversial stores, that he devoured them with such avidity. The animated picture which those ponderous tomes present, as it were unconsciously, of ancient manners, opinions, and deeds; the dramatic splendour of the narratives in which the glowing fancies of the African fathers have clothed the stirring events of the times in which they lived; these caught his attention more than their controversial value. Van Huysman perceived that he had a poetical nature to deal with; an inert power which accident might awake, as the chords of the Æolian harp are mute till the chance breeze passes which wakes it into passionate music; and he had no wish to stifle, nor even divert, this natural sensibility,

but rather to direct its energies into the channel where it was intended they should flow; for he was too deeply versed in human science, not to know that even the eloquence of religion is cold and powerless, unless kindled by those fine emotions and sparkling thoughts which only poetical enthusiasm can strike out of the flints of logic.

Mervyn was allowed the full range of the noble library which the Jesuits had accumulated in their college, and though it consisted, of course, of such works only as had past the keen ordeal of their criticism, there was much to kindle strange thoughts and yearnings in so young a breast. The activity of his genius, deprived of its proper exercise, vented its wild profusion of power in inert speculation and dreamy revery, which, however carefully concealed in his own heart, increased the discontent which preyed upon him inwardly. As time passed, strange ideas crept into his mind, he knew not how; indistinct longings to venture out on that brilliant, restless sea of love and glory which his imagination painted in the world; a vague yearning for power and freedom, which are, in general, the first wishes formed by the aspiring heart of youth, invaded his monkish solitude.

The Jesuits, who desired that their pupils should be well qualified to mingle in a world which they were to govern only by the supremacy of intellect, had accumulated in their library the choicest works of human genius, even in branches which they considered frivolous. Poets and romancers were in this latter category, and though, in general, forbidden books, the rector was not unwilling to allow Mervyn's taste some exercise in this direction. Among all these, Ariosto soon became the young student's favourite, and many of his happiest hours were spent over those charmed lays. Ariosto is, in truth, the very poet of youth; he breathes nought but love and triumph and pleasure; his passions are in their full and beautiful energy, his flowers in their loveliest bloom; no scent of autumn haunts the deep verdure of his forests All things are possible in his legends; the prejudices and harsh laws of Nature and of man yield alike to his magic, or are not supposed to exist. Even death and despair and sorrow are but shadowed angels, not the black fiends of northern imagination; his heroes and heroines die, but it is reclining on beds of violets, with the songs of nightingales sweetly warbling them to rest.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WORLD AND GENIUS.

As Mervyn's knowledge of the deeds and opinions of men increased, the idea of inquiring from whom he had derived his existence occurred to him, at first as a subject of curiosity, but finally it ripened into a deep and anxious desire. Circumstances contributed to fan this kindled wish. Republican as was the equality which the Jesuits enforced in their academies, and resolutely as they endeavoured to annihilate even the shadows of those distinctions of rank and birth which, in that age were emblazoned in all the pomp and pride of heraldry, those distinctions were recollected and enforced among the pupils with more severity for the prohibition of the

masters. Among youths who were principally sprung from the noblest blood of France and England, what but shame and contempt could be the portion of the almost nameless Mervyn? Even among the poorer class of students, whom the fathers brought up for charity or policy, he found little sympathy. However vulgar and unhonoured their names might be, all had *two*—all could speak of families and relations. It is true that the fierceness with which he resented any attack, however oblique, on his obscure parentage, and the courage and success which marked his outbursts of passion, discouraged many from trying experiments on his feelings. But still schoolboys as well as men know how to pierce the soul with those fine wounds which, deeply as they enter, leave no marks to appeal to, or to justify revenge.

It was therefore, after long sufferings and bitter heart-burnings, proudly concealed from the gaze of all, that Mervyn at length resolved to venture on a step which nothing but desperation—as he then thought—could induce him to take. Often as he had endeavoured, by various means and from various persons, masters and servants, to acquire some notion of his early years, and how he came among those youths who had all little histories of a *Past*

to relate, he obtained only chilling negatives, or absolute commands never to mention the subject.

Mervyn was at length nearly goaded to madness by the reproaches and sarcasms of his companions, who, with the malice inspired by envy of his personal superiority, circulated among themselves a story, the absurdity of which only added zest to its falsehood. It was said that he was the illegitimate offspring of a robber, beheaded at St. Omer, in whose fate Van Huysman had taken great spiritual interest, and was said to have accepted the charge of his child from the dying malefactor.

One day, when the whole school was collected in the Theatrum, for it was an examination-day, and not a sound was heard but the studious hum of the scholars, Mervyn stepped boldly forward, his cheeks flushed with excitement, his eyes sparkling, and his whole frame trembling with nervous sensibility. The whole hall watched his movements with surprise, and those who had been the most covertly guilty towards him, were not without terror when they saw him advance to the cathedra itself—the lofty chair in which Van Huysman sat, enforcing silence and awe with the mere dignity of his presence.

The rector himself seldom or never interfered in the direct business of tuition; but his gaunt majestic figure, the consciousness that his searching eye was upon all, the knowledge of his inflexible severity, kept more order and submission than could the rods of a hundred ushers. Towards this dread presence, alone, uncalled for, but seemingly undaunted, did Mervyn advance.

The rector himself raised his eyes from a book he was perusing, not without some surprise, and inquired with harsh brevity, "Quid vis fili?"

"I want you to answer me three questions, most reverend," replied Mervyn, resolutely, and in French —a forbidden language during the academy hours.

"Tu?" replied the rector, letting his book down on his lap, and gazing with his stern eyes on the boy. There was an emphasis on this solitary syllable, which made all tremble but Mervyn.

"Will you answer them, father?—for till you do, I swear by this holy cross woven into my clothes and heart, I will never learn another lesson though you kill me?"

"Indeed!—and what are thy questions, child?" said the rector, in a milder tone than any one expected.

"I want to know from whom I spring?—have I a father?—Why do I know a language which I never learned?—And, why," he continued, bursting into tears, "why do I dream sad things that make me weep, and which yet seem to me, when I wake, like recollections of persons and places I have actually known and seen?"

For a moment Van Huysman was absolutely silent with astonishment at the daring of the boy, and the extraordinary questions which he asked. The next, and his severe mind clutched at the advantage to be made by answering—to humble the boy's proud heart, and force upon him the conviction of the utter dependance in which he stood to the power which had thus far been his refuge and support. He therefore replied with perfect calmness, even gentleness,

"Since you have asked me, son, I will answer you, and according to our custom, with truth and simplicity, although it certainly pains me to inflict pain upon you. Briefly then, you have a father, a poor serving-man—not beheaded at St. Omer, but who will doubtless undergo that or a similar fate some day either in France or England, for he is a noted highwayman in both countries. His name

will rest an eternal secret from you. With regard to your second question, English is your native tongue, and for purposes which I shall explain at a future time, I have carefully cultivated your knowledge of a language which God has given you for great purposes. As to your dreams, I must needs impute their wildness and gloom either to a temptation of Satan, or to the irregular course of reading in which I am conscious I have too much indulged you."

Even as he uttered these harsh truths, Van Huysman was touched with pity for the young recipient, who stood pale and quivering with contending passions before him. He hesitated as to whether he might not soften his assertions a little, but observing the fiery mark of what seemed to him defiance on the boy's cheek, he was silent.

The first words of his reply caused a sort of fearful titter among the students, although one glance from his terrible eye utterly suppressed all indications or even tendencies to mirth. But the laugh was heard too distinctly by Mervyn, and haunted him through years and years of far different scenes and events.

The rector, however, seemed to wait patiently for some reply, and when he heard none, though burning tears gushed profusely from his pupil's eyes, and

he seemed choking with sobs, natural feelings almost conquered his acquired stoicism.

"My son," he said, with peculiar gentleness, "do not sorrow as one that hath no hope. You are not fatherless nor friendless; the church, the common mother of all mankind, is peculiarly yours. She has accepted you as an orphan into her bosom, and regards you as one of the most precious deposits which Heaven could confide to her charge. Her vast inheritance is yours; your portion in Israel is as hers. I say it aloud, my son, before all these men of proud and ancient blood—obscurely born as you are, I do believe that nature has created you to be their leader and master."

"Why then am I their jest and football?" burst from poor Mervyn's heart, and overcome by shame and agony, he fell insensible at the rector's feet.

Van Huysman lifted him, and administered restoratives which quickly renovated his exhausted faculties, and then directed him to retire to his cell. The rector immediately resumed his habitual stoicism of manner, and the exercises of the morning went on as usual to their conclusion.

On Van Huysman's seeking Mervyn in his cell, some hours afterwards, he found him stretched on

his mattress, weeping, and evidently exhausted with sorrow. It was in this mood that the Jesuit hoped to find him, and he knew well what springs to set in movement in the proud spirit with which he had to deal. He sat down by his bed, and in a tone calmer, graver, and more affectionate than ever he had used before, began to expostulate with the youth. He reasoned profoundly, and with an earnestness which seemed as if he were not himself altogether free from the grand mania of the English republicans—on the nothingness of birth, and indeed of all human distinctions; on the sublime pride of owing nothing to men's opinions, and yet of mastering them; of being the architect of his own fortunes; and he sketched a dim but magnificent outline of the grandeur to which the gifts he had received from nature alone might raise him; terminating the vista by a splendid aërial view of the domes of the Vatican. He alluded, with more emotion than ever Mervyn had imagined he could feel, to the misfortunes of his own early youth, from which the greatness of his birth was so far from protecting him that it had been the chief cause of his sufferings. He did not indeed mention how—but there were rumours afloat which Mervyn

had heard, concerning some early love for a woman of inferior rank, and of a tragical sequel brought on by the pride and fury of his family.

All that could be suggested by the noble and austere philosophy of which he was a disciple, Van Huysman offered to Mervyn. But the maxims of stoicism were not made for youth, and its petrifying doctrine needs a deep mingling with the waters of sorrow, ere it can harden the feelings into that stony and passive repose which, according to Epictetus, is happiness. Mervyn, therefore, listened submissively, but without being persuaded.

The rector observed his little success, and quietly took another tack. He touched him on the score of his pride, and asked him if he meant to give his envious companions the satisfaction of observing what effect their poor sarcasms had upon him. Mervyn took fire at the suggestion, and dried his tears, declaring he would let them see he was their superior in every thing but the mere chance of birth, and that he was fitted to win himself a prouder name than any they had inherited. Van Huysman applauded this resolution, and having exacted a promise that he would show his contempt

only by philosophical indifference, led him to the refectory, where the scholars were assembled at their noonday meal.

The dinner past over with the usual silence and order, and at its conclusion the students were allowed to take their accustomed recreation in the grounds of the college.

Mervyn, who was wont to be foremost in the athletic sports of the playground, kept now at a distance, and wandered aloof, with his arms folded, lost as it seemed in bitter meditation. The other youths, released from the stern watch of their superiors, began to make jests on him, and to mock his melancholy manners. This roused the bitterness and defiance of his nature; he walked contemptuously through them, uttering not a word, but seeming to glare defiance on all. A general hiss was the consequence, and forgetting his promise to the rector, he turned round and challenged any or all to fight.

There was an immediate and dead silence to this proposal. It happened, however, that some young men were playing at tennis, and one of them, son of a Marshal of France, threw the ball, whether by accident or design, at Mervyn, who received a violent blow on his temple. To catch the ball and send it

back with emphasis at the young noble's head, was the work of an instant; blood instantly flowed from the wound, and the sufferer, foaming with rage and pain, raised a cry of "Down with the bastard!" The cry was instantly caught up, and repeated by the whole mob of schoolboys, and a general attack on Mervyn followed, in the midst of which a carriage, drawn by mules very superbly harnessed, and surrounded by lackeys in dark livery, arrived at the gates, from which an old man alighted, leaning on Van Huysman's arm.

So suddenly had the riot risen, that the visiter's attention and that of Van Huysman's were called to it at the same moment, and just as the hunted Mervyn stood hot and exhausted at the carriage door.

Van Huysman's waved hand hushed the whole hubbub instantly, and there was a deep pause of silence.

"This is singular discipline, brother," said the new-comer, sternly. "Is it thus that you allow your pupils to hunt each other, like savage beasts? And what is this?—Can it be? Is this poor panting child my—I mean is it, Mervyn?"

As if in reply to the padre's question, all pointed to the bleeding skull of the marshal's son.

"What say you to this charge, Mervyn?" said the visiter, in tones of great kindness. "Be not afraid of me, child—I will be your friend, as I have ever been, if you give me not cause to the contrary. Do you not remember me?"

"I have never forgotten you," said the boy, passionately, and snatching the padre's hand, he kissed it, and burst into tears.

"Your protector, child," said Oliva, gently, for he it was. "And now tell me, why did you throw the ball at De Grammont's head?"

"He called me bastard!" sobbed Mervyn.

"Is this true, M. de Grammont?" said the padre, turning to the young Frenchman.

"And so he is, my lord," replied he. "His reverence told us all he was so, this morning, from the chair."

"How, brother?" exclaimed Oliva, turning sharply round.

"My lord, I will explain all," said the rector meekly; "but it is not fit that my apology should be heard by these unreasoning boys."

"And bastard as you call me," exclaimed Mervyn, again yielding to the violence of his passions,

"I tell you all, French nobles, to your teeth—that I were prouder to be the bastard, if I am such, of one whose fathers conquered at Crecy, than the lawfullest heir of the proudest noble that was conquered there."

Oliva smiled, though with some degree of reproof; and commanding all to retire to their cells, he entered the college, leaning on Van Huysman's arm.

The state of Mervyn's mind, which Van Huysman now described with minute sagacity, troubled the padre, and he determined to examine him more particularly himself. Mervyn was accordingly sent for, and entered with a modest and downcast visage. The padre was secretly touched with his humility and beauty, as he knelt to receive his blessing, and arose reverentially before him in his plain garb of a young acolyte.

"How is this, son," he said, mildly, "your reverend rector tells me you grow restless, pining, discontented; that you are not satisfied with yourself, nor with your companions? What is the reason of this? What do you desire? Do not fear to tell me," continued he, after waiting a few moments for

a reply. "I was young in other days myself. Tell me boldly, son, what would you have to make you content?"

"Glory, father!" replied the boy, resolutely.

"Glory, my son?" replied Oliva, smiling. "And what glory?—of heaven or of earth?"

"Of both," said Mervyn. "I am dishonoured by my birth; I would repair the injustice which fate and men's opinions have inflicted on me. I would win a name, father—a name! which the crime of my parents has denied me. I would not grow, wither, and die like a weed on a rock, which the ocean of time sweeps away for ever, none know whither and none care."

"And this glory—have I not put you on the way to win it, son?" said Oliva, somewhat reproachfully.

"Father, forgive me; I dare confess to you—I dare!" said Mervyn, passionately. "No; I know that I can never win glory—never, never fulfil even my duties—as a minister of religion. The sword, the sword, my father! give me a sword! let me die as a champion of the church in the field of battle! I ask no better fate; but I feel that I have not within

me the qualities which make the priest; I have neither patience, nor meekness, nor power to persuade, nor am I passionless as the marble on which I lean. Be not angry, holy father, and let me die for you and the church, but on some field of battle, not at the stake."

"Child, you mistake your vocation," said Oliva, with some degree of sadness in his tones. "Know you not that the same prejudices which declare your birth infamous will meet you on every hand, and keep your soaring genius for ever chained to the dust! Hope you to wash away the stain in your blood? or that the proud nobles of France will suffer a base-born plebeian to reap the harvest of glory which they have long regarded as their peculiar property? Know you not that the class from which you spring are the hewers of wood, and drawers of water; the men whose sinews and blood plough and sow the soil which their masters reap?"

"Is there no refuge then, father, from the scorn of mankind? Father, how have I deserved this punishment?" exclaimed Mervyn, vehemently.

"What is, is; we cannot alter it," replied Oliva. "The English republicans vainly attempted to break

the injustice of ages; they have their king back again, and with him the whole mountain of tyranny which their levers raised for an instant only to let it fall with additional force. Judge yourself, Mervyn —what have you to expect from the justice of the French nobility? These boys who persecute and hate you because your merit is superior to theirs, are your cotemporaries—will in time be the noblesse of France, to whom you look for the reward of toil and blood!"

"Then am I born a slave, and a slave shall I go to my grave!" exclaimed Mervyn, with a fresh gush of tears.

"Not so, my son; there is one refuge, one only," replied the padre, with solemnity. "The church opens her arms visibly to receive you—the only true republic where merit may hope to thrive against prejudice, and set her feet on the purple of kings. Deem you the tremendous empire of mind is not worth wielding? Think you it is nobler to sway the bodies of men than their souls? What say you? Hath not the sovereignty over men's thoughts a grandeur more attractive to our immortal nature than the mere control of the clay that shrines it? And let

me tell thee too, my son," he added, observing the effect which his words seemed to produce; "let me tell you, that spiritual as our dominion is, or should be, it doth oft and necessarily involve temporal sway and power. Listen, child! who, deem you, governs France? Not Louis, though he be the king! Who, Spain? Not Carlos, no! But these are secrets too important to be trusted to you as yet. What say you, son? will you be one of us, and share the colossal design on which the eyes of Heaven and earth are alike fixed?"

"Oh, if I but thought I could attain such glory, without perilling my salvation through inability to perform the conditions," said Mervyn, his fine features mantling with enthusiasm, when the padre interrupted him—

"You can, you shall, my child!" he said, with a degree of vehemence very unusual in his subdued nature. "Heaven confided you to my care, like Moses to the daughter of Pharaoh, a helpless infant, redeemed you from a land of heresy, for the great purpose to which I dedicate you. Yes, my son, your glory shall rival that of Saint Augustine! He but converted a barbarous people to the fold of

Christ; you shall perform a harder task—you shall bring them back to the fold when the wolf has scattered them."

Carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, and of his own character, Mervyn threw himself at the padre's feet, and in broken accents declared his willingness to accept the task confided to him, if he was not altogether unworthy of it. Raising his eyes then to Heaven, and laying his hands on the boy's head, Oliva solemnly blessed and dedicated him to the service of the church, while Van Huysman echoed a deep Amen.

Mervyn was on the point of rising when the padre observed him start, and saw that his eye was caught by some object at the door, which seemed to disturb him, like the silent entrance of a spectre. Van Huysman, too, turned and beheld a man whom he thought he recollected, though dimly and unpleasantly, as if associated with some disagreeable dream. The stranger seemed indulging in a sort of sardonic grin, probably at the scene he had interrupted, though it vanished the instant the elders turned, and became by some sudden transmutation a smile of hypocritical humility.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

"DISTURB not yourself, brother," said Oliva, after a moment's pause. "It is one of my attendants, an acolyte whom at earnest entreaty I have been prevailed on to place with you here; but, brother Titus, methinks you somewhat exceed your privilege, to dog my privacy here."

"My lord," replied the brother, with abject submissiveness of tone, "if you had not bid me wait upon you here, I were, as suits me, engaged in the holy penitence you have been pleased to impose on me."

There was something in the tones of the man's voice singularly displeasing to Mervyn.

"Truly, yes: I had forgotten I meant to introduce you to the reverend rector," said Oliva. "I will be candid with you, brother, and in your presence say all that I intend to say about you, that you may know on what terms you stand here. Some weeks ago," he continued, addressing Van Huysman, "I received a letter from our brother Whitebread, in London, which was brought by this acolyte. Among other matters, the contents of that letter did recommend the bearer to us, with words to this purpose: That his name is Titus Oates, son of an anabaptist preacher, discharged from the family of the Duke of Norfolk, and the chaplaincy of a war vessel, on accusation of preaching popish doctrines: that he had at one time exercised the martial trade, but growing weary of it and of the world, he desires to be reconciled to the church, and to die in her bosom, if you are willing to indulge him with a trial, brother?"

"What hath induced you, friend, to wish to be of our society?" said Van Huysman, musingly.

"Reverend father," replied Titus, "a deep conviction that it alone can recall the wanderers of Israel, and work the extirpation of the Canaanite. But," continued the acolyte, "can you, re-

verend father have forgotten that you once saved the life of one Captain Oates, left by robbers bound and bruised in the forest of Clairvaux?"

"And art thou he, friend?" said Van Huysman.

"I am all that is left of that sinful man," said brother Titus, humbly; "and I will freely confess that in those days your blessed exhortations fell on mine ear like corn on a barren rock. But blessed is he who throws bread on all waters, for after many days he shall find it again."

"Ay, brother, but perchance musty and rotten," replied the rector, sternly. "But tell me, art thou cheerfully resolved to forsake the world and its vanities, and to become a new man?"

"Heaven be my witness, I am!" said Titus, turning up his eyes till only the whites were visible.

"Your name, your country, your parentage, we know," continued the rector, as if anxious to work out some objection. "But, prithee, what is your age? And are you subject to any bodily infirmity, or owe any man debt?"

"For the body, 'sbud! I'm as strong as a horse," said Oates, coarsely. "For debts, I have paid all I owe to the last farthing I had to pay with; and for my age, I was forty-two last Michaelmas."

"Methinks, brother, at my entreaty, you might admit him to probation?" interposed the padre.

"Nay, I would not be as one of those harsh and heretic builders who reject the stone because it is flawed," said the rector. "But this man—no matter. We admit you on a trial; go hence to the cell of the examiner, father Lascelles, who will write your name and statements in the books."

"Son Mervyn, guide the novice thither," said the padre. "We must have private speech with the reverend rector. Why do you hesitate, youth?"

"It likes me not, most reverend," replied Mervyn, frankly. "I do remember this brother's eyes—I have seen them in a dream."

"Tut, tut! you are a foolish phantasist," said Oliva, sharply. "Let us hear no more of these strange reveries. Go with him, I command you."

Mervyn obeyed his superior's order, but with a sullen ill-will, which was very apparent. Brother Titus, however, seemed not to notice this, and followed him in silence till they were out of ear-shot in the corridor, when the former observed,—

"I should remember thee, youth—ay, sooth, it was my chance to be an inmate of this convent when thy father abandoned thee here."

"My father! what was his name? They will not tell me—only that he was a thief!" exclaimed Mervyn, with sudden and vivid interest.

"Not a thief, but a robber, boy,—which is much more honourable—something between your rogue and your soldier," said Oates. "But I, too, consider myself bound by the prohibition thou speakest of, and will not now tell thee his name on any consideration. Nevertheless, the time may come, when I shall make thee wiser," continued Oates, taking the boy's unwilling hand. "Meanwhile, count me among those who love thee. Leave me, with this message to the father rector—that I know from whom thou springest, and that the first proofs I offer him of my obedience and Christian spirit, are these —that I will never betray the secret."

By this crafty means did Oates establish a sort of influence over Mervyn's mind, as the depository of a secret which he would have given almost life to fathom.

A few days after this ill-omened introduction, the General resumed his journey, but he pledged his word to Mervyn, that as soon as he had worthily fulfilled his novitiate, he should come to him at Rome, and profess. This assurance seemed to re-

animate the drooping spirits of the boy, and he separated himself almost wholly from his insulting fellows, plunging with renewed ardour into the severe studies which were necessary to place him at their head.

But this fit of application, like all that is violent, was not lasting; the influence of his mercurial nature returned, and inaction began to grow a positive pain. It was in vain that he strove to stifle those thoughts, which involuntarily rose in his heart. A restless voice seemed perpetually to incite him forth, to do—he knew not what, but there appeared to be a niche in destiny left vacant for him.

These vague aspirations might have at last died away, as has been so often the case, had they not found fuel. Oates had attached himself in a particular manner to the young novice. He laboured also by the subtlest flatteries to worm himself into the rector's good graces; but Van Huysman's cold penetration and knowledge of the world, were not so easily deceived. He conceived a very evident dislike for his new inmate, and seemed to have privately resolved that the term of his probation should be that of his residence in the college.

It was otherwise with the unsophisticated novice.

Brother Titus soon managed to overcome the aversion which he had at first found in Mervyn, and to twine himself insidiously into his confidence. Against all prohibition and rules, he lent him works which it was little less than treason to introduce into the college—novels of a profligate age, which seemed to have lost even that phantom of morality, decency. The curiosity of youth induced Mervyn to read these compositions with eagerness, and though his pure mind revolted at the vicious manners delineated, still there was something but too fascinating in the excitement and glow into which they cast the imagination. Oates's influence was also increased by his talent in describing the world he had left, having acted many parts himself in its stormy drama.

These narratives, coloured by the vivid fancy of youth, roused the lulled restlessness of Mervyn's nature. He longed to join that brilliant march of men and events, and soon began to regard the monastic walls which enclosed him as a prison, barring out pleasure and glory.

As Oates's project began to ripen, he increased his artifices to entangle the innocent boy, whom he had apparently taken into training. He inflamed

his discontent by insinuations which were eagerly caught at by Mervyn. He dropped hints that he doubted the story of his base parentage; and as all particulars concerning it were carefully concealed, there was abundant scope for the romantic conjectures which he threw out from time to time. He stirred the fanciful mind of the boy with vague hints that he was sprung from a noble source, and that the story which gave him a robber for his father, was invented to cover some iniquitous secret; and he gradually proceeded to instil a notion that the Jesuits were in some black conspiracy with those who had cheated him of his inheritance, and to represent that England was the only place where he was likely to obtain any information on this interesting point.

Oates seemed as well acquainted with the political condition of England at the period, as if he had made it a peculiar study, and he knew how to dress out his information in an attractive garb. Mervyn was both amused and excited by the description which he gave, though without any formed purpose or notion why he took such pleasure in them.

"And do you see, brother," said Oates one day, as they walked alone in the gardens of the convent

—"do you see—a stirring world will there be soon in England. The Jesuits have concealed every thing from you, though they mean to use you as a blind instrument. They have a vast plot whereby they mean to bring back arbitrary government and popery—I mean our holy Catholic faith. They have gained the king secretly, and the Duke of York is a notorious papist. The ministers are a base and bloodthirsty set, who will do any thing to preserve favour, and keep their enemies on the cold benches. But there are many in England who would rather see all in confusion again than lose their precious religion and liberties. Yea, the old leaven of Cromwell is still fermenting in the masses, and what an angel from heaven, what a second Salvator Mundi would he be who could, and would, expose this wicked plot—I mean that Jesuitical plot —which is afoot. Neither would he lack powerful friends and men of great quality to back him. There's all my Lord Shaftesbury's party, and the fine old republicans, who hold their lives as cheap in the balance of England's good;—not to mention that fierce and turbulent commonalty of London, which wants but a leader to show itself mighty as under the Roundhead parliament. But it were a

bold man should lead them! He must not pause or pant, or, like ill-trained bloodhounds, they would devour their own master."

"But our fathers—if indeed they have any such plan—are too politic men to be easily baffled," said Mervyn.

"Ay, there it is!" replied Oates. "But I do think, if a man could by any chance get to see the correspondence which the rector carries on perpetually with England, it would need small explanation to understand how things are going."

"Perhaps not," said Mervyn; "but doubtless, brother, these things are concealed for good reasons."

"And yet I marvel that you, who are constantly closeted with Van Huysman—who must so often be left alone with these precious documents—have never had the curiosity to examine into the secrets they contain?" said Oates, carelessly.

"Now Heaven forbid I should chime into the tune of my birth, by such meanness!" replied Mervyn, colouring. "And if this great plan be indeed formed, it becomes both you and me, as true servants of the church, to forward it with our life's blood, and perform in silence whatever is enjoined by her infallible authority."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied Oates, with one of his ugly smiles. "But how know you, brother, but that those letters may contain some inklings of your true birth and stolen inheritance?—those especially which pass between Van Huysman and the General?—Bah! if I were you, and had such occasion given me, I would look over those documents, with proper prudence—and then if you report their contents to me, I may be able to dive deeper into these mysteries than your innocence permits you."

"I had rather die as I have lived—a beggar, dependant for existence—than be guilty of such betrayal," replied Mervyn, indignantly.

Oates laughed it off, as he generally did when he found himself baffled, and quietly turned the conversation into some other channel. But he had laid the first stones of the foundation on which he hoped to erect his future superstructure of cunning and guilt, and he determined not to forego his plans at the first unfavourable symptom in the soil on which his proposed building was to rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEMPTER.

ALTHOUGH this proposal of Oates shook Mervyn's growing good opinion of him, he soon recovered his ground, with one so ignorant of the world, and of its wickedness and artifice.

Meanwhile Van Huysman viewed this intimacy, and indeed all his new guest's movements, with suspicion. Certain facts, which could not elude his keen observation, very soon induced him to order Mervyn to cease associating with brother Titus, and to convey information to the latter, that he must hold himself in readiness to quit the college as soon as a

reply could arrive to his demand to that effect from Rome.

This prohibition appeared to Mervyn, and was represented by Oates, as an act of intolerable tyranny; and the youth's compassion was excited by observing the state of excommunication in which his friend was shortly placed. He was not allowed to converse with any of the scholars; he dined at a solitary table in the hall, and was treated in all respects as one out of the pale.

Oates appeared to bear this with great patience, secretly harvesting his revenge. But Mervyn's heart was touched with the seeming injustice, and he took private opportunities of assuring brother Titus of his continued sympathy and regard. But even these stolen interviews became suspected, and Van Huysman strictly commanded him not to speak to Oates, whom he now openly designated as a crafty spy.

Matters were in this state when Van Huysman was summoned to Paris, to attend a meeting of the order, which was to discuss certain important measures. The rector exacted a promise from Mervyn that he would not speak to Oates during his absence; informing him, at the same time, that on his return

that worthy would be expelled, for certain offences which he had committed against the rules of the order. The better to secure his pledge, Van Huysman ordered his pupil to keep in his private cabinet, except at meal-times, and to employ himself there in translating a homily of St. Chrysostom, which he knew would occupy him until his return.

Unhappily Oates had already lent Mervyn a book, which, from its being at once so celebrated, and so strictly forbidden in the college, that it stood in the library chained and padlocked to the shelves, had always been an object of great curiosity to him—the novels of Boccaccio. The exquisite style of this work, the fascination of its inflammatory descriptions, the brilliant satire, even the boldness with which the licentious Italian assailed all that he had been accustomed to revere, took a forcible hold of the youth's imagination. Although, in the severe and intellectual order to which he belonged, Mervyn had never observed any of the scandals which form the staple of Boccaccio's satires on the monks of his time, still it seemed strange to him that in the period of her greatest grandeur and prosperity, such rottenness should be at the very heart of the church. This shook the foundation of all his beliefs; which

was precisely the effect, coupled with the awakening influence of the passionate poetry of Boccaccio's legends on the dormant emotions of his youthful nature, that Oates had calculated on producing. Mervyn's romantic temperament was flattered at every turn by some sweet melody of hope and love. The hideous prejudices of the world, which had long glared at him like the heads of the hydra, seemed utterly annihilated. Love conquered and subdued every thing; the obstacles of birth and fortune vanished at the mere touch of his roseate fingers. All the cares and vicissitudes of life, the stormiest turns of fate, were but matters for a midsummer revery, or an enchanting and musical tale told to the murmur of waterfalls, and dim voluptuous strains that came and went like the breezes that brought them, no man knew whence nor whither.

With this sealed book in his possession, still Mervyn was obliged to use the greatest caution in reading it, and his apprehensions of discovery perhaps increased his relish. The present opportunity seemed to him irresistible, and he abandoned himself to the delicious perusal. Depending a great deal on the facility with which he usually performed his tasks, Mervyn continued to read and read, until in-

formation that the rector was expected much sooner than he had calculated, fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of his enjoyments. He was obliged immediately to apply himself with great vigour to the homily of St. Chrysostom, which he found much longer than he expected; and to finish his task he found it necessary to continue it after the college hours; but as no lamps were allowed, this was sufficiently difficult. Unluckily he recollected that Oates had a little taper and flint which he often used himself, and he slipped a piece of paper into his hand, requesting him to lend them. Oates complied instantly, and with a look so expressive, that though much puzzled by it, Mervyn saw that his friend understood much more in his words than their simple meaning.

Dreading the severity of his preceptor, who, he now learned, was expected home early in the morning, Mervyn applied himself to his task with nervous trepidation and haste, and certainly took little heed of the niceties of the great father's Greek. It was growing late, and his toils were far from finished; the moon, which was very bright, shone in upon him and his papers as he sat pale and exhausted,—half quenching the rays of his taper. The college

was profoundly quiet, the whole society having retired to rest, and no sound was audible but the sighing and waving of the trees in an orchard immediately adjoining. Mervyn felt a deep shadow of melancholy stealing over him, and once or twice tears gushed to his eyes, and fell on the paper which he was elaborately covering. The silence and repose of the night gave his fevered spirits pause for reflection, and he began to repent that he had ever listened to Oates's advice, and forfeited the sweet peace of conscience which he had once enjoyed. The strictness of his education caused him to imagine that the faults he had committed were of the blackest dye, inasmuch as he had broken a solemn command of the church. A sensation of superstitious fear crept over him, and he almost imagined he beheld the Evil One himself at the moment when, raising his eyes suddenly, he encountered the sinister gaze of Oates, fixed upon him.

"Sancta Maria! how art thou here?" he exclaimed, for it was no longer possible to keep his pledge to the Jesuit.

"Hush! make no noise!—have you discovered any thing?" said Oates, eagerly.

"Discovered any thing! In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"Among the papers—among the papers!" exclaimed Oates, clutching up his manuscript,—"any thing I mean about your birth, or—the *ploats* of these Jesuits?"

"These papers, Mr. Oates, are but a translation from St. Chrysostom," replied Mervyn, angrily. "I know not what you mean, but I advise you to return to your own apartment instantly."

"Bah, bah!—a homily?" said Oates in a disappointed tone. "You are a calf to make no better use of such golden opportunities. Tut!—is yon the casket where he keeps these choice letters of his?—Who knows!—it may contain some marvellous particulars of your birth. You may be a king's son, for aught I know."

"It is locked; and if it were not, I would defend it with my life," replied Mervyn.

"Bah! bah! you rave, my young sprig," said Oates, turning sharply. "You *dare* not, boy!—you are in my power."

As he said this, he advanced towards an escritoir of massive oak, highly carved and polished, which

he looked at for some minutes with great curiosity, at the same time feeling it round the lid.

"He hath them well secured; the contents must needs be valuable," he said with much unction. "We will examine them, Mervyn, but he shall not suspect either of us. He shall think he forgot to lock this casket of his."

And brother Titus suddenly produced a bunch of skeleton keys, with one of which he twisted the lock open, and threw back the lid. The vista of letters carefully packed and endorsed, which was thus revealed, seemed to kindle his eyes as gold might a miser's.

"Come hither, Mervyn dear, come hither," he exclaimed; "doubtless, the great secret of your birth is here—quick, despatch!—open some while I examine these."

"On your peril touch not one, Oates!" said the boy, springing forward and seizing his arm.

"What, boy, would you have me murder you?" said brother Titus, his countenance flaming up like a demon's. "I should be loth to hurt you, child, because I have uses for you; but I have cut a tougher throat than yours ere now."

"You dare not, Oates—you are not such a monstrous ruffian!" said Mervyn, vehemently. "But you shall not read these papers, though I die to hinder you."

"Pooh, pooh, fool! why would you stand in your own light?" continued brother Titus, more mildly. "Go on with your homily, if your sickly conscience will not let you aid in the work, and leave me to manage this stuff. Ha, what's this? letters from Master Coleman, the duke's secretary?"

"Leave the papers alone, Oates, or whatever be the consequence, I will summon assistance!" said Mervyn, resolutely tearing the letter from his friend's hand.

"Why then, I must do a desperate thing," exclaimed Oates, groping his hand in his doublet pocket.

"What will you do, Oates?" said Mervyn, turning pale and his heart beating thickly, for he thought he saw the gleam of a knife in Oates's pocket.

"Do! do nothing; but I must have these papers," said Oates in an altered tone, and withdrawing his hand from the weapon. "I love thee, boy, and would make thy fortune; and there is that in these papers will do it for us both. Read here,

child, read here—from the duke's secretary, I tell you. 'Tis a pious robbery; we shall pluck out the heart of this popish and royal conspiracy!"

"Once more and for the last time, begone and leave these papers unread, or I call for help!" exclaimed Mervyn, with a fierceness and energy on which Oates had evidently not calculated.

"Unhand me, imp!" he said, shaking his grasp loose. "And utter but one word more, much less call out, and I'll—— Hush, what is that?"

"Some one is coming!" said Mervyn. "I hear steps. Do, dear Oates, begone; if they discover us——"

"They are in the corridor; we cannot escape!" replied the brother, staring aghast at Mervyn. "Put these away—put out the candle—stay, I'll hide this in my pocket. Now for the desk—what a cursed chance!"

Steps were now heard coming up the corridor, and a voice which brought the thick dew to Mervyn's brow. They looked at each other with an expression of guilty alarm, which Mervyn shared, though he scarce knew why, and then both began hurriedly thrusting the papers back again. But unhappily, in the confusion of haste, Mervyn stum-

bled over a footstool, and fell with considerable noise on the ground. The door was instantly opened; a voice demanded, "Who is here at this time of night?" and the stately figure and severe countenance of Van Huysman appeared, lighted by two monks who carried torches.

Oates's first idea was to make a rush, but the cowardice of his nature banished the idea as soon as formed, and he stood livid and trembling beside the violated escritoir.

"Ha, what is this? My desk forced—my papers scattered about! Oates, Mervyn—alone— at midnight!" exclaimed Van Huysman, turning pale too. "How is this, brother? Tell me instantly."

"We—we—found the desk open, and out of curiosity—out of curiosity merely," said Oates, stammeringly.

"Mervyn, my son! can this be true? is this possible?" said Van Huysman, in a voice husky with emotion. "A taper too—with this vile man—my most precious papers thrown about! Wretched boy, you have indeed proved yourself to be the true son of a robber!"

"I—I—," began Mervyn, but overcome by shame

and despair, he sobbed convulsively, and uttered not an intelligible word.

"How did you procure this taper, boy? and what book is this?—Boccaccio!"

"As for the taper, he had it from me, and for this purpose!" said Oates, boldly. "He as well as I suspect that he is of noble birth, kept here for some villanous intent, and we intended to examine these papers to learn the truth, when your abrupt entrance disturbed us."

"Is this true, Mervyn?" said Van Huysman, in a tone of sorrow and anger so mingled, that it was impossible to tell which preponderated.

"It is a lie, a monstrous lie, and you know it, Oates," exclaimed the boy.

"What, brother, did I not lend you a taper, and did we not agree to search this cabinet together? Why, there are the skeleton keys, which you told me you borrowed of the blacksmith of St. Omer—there, in the folds of your mantle."

Which was the case, for he had dexterously slipped the keys into the boy's dress, directly he heard the footsteps approach.

"It is true, indeed, unhappy boy! but he who rears

a tiger must expect to be torn to pieces," said Van Huysman, shaking the keys out of Mervyn's mantle. "Retire both of you to your cells, and to-morrow I will hold a chapter to determine on what punishment is fit for the destroyer and misleader of youth, and the criminal folly of youth itself. Brothers, see that every outlet be well secured, and convey these conspirators to their apartments."

"Father, do you—do you condemn me unheard?" exclaimed Mervyn, in an agony of grief.

"You are heard, sir, look around!" returned the Jesuit, seating himself and clasping his hands. Then raising his eyes to Heaven, he exclaimed, "Be thy will done! the last hold I had on earthly affections is torn from me!"

Mervyn was taken to his cell by one of the monks, with a heart swollen almost to bursting, but too proud to make any further attempt at justification. Oates was also taken to his dormitory, not without a smile of malicious triumph at his young victim. Van Huysman then proceeded to gather up his papers, and to ascertain if any were missing, debating in his own mind the possibilities of Mervyn's innocence, and what punishment it would

be necessary to inflict. Unfortunately he was so deeply involved in this latter train of thoughts that he did not miss, until it was too late, a packet which Oates had secured, which was of the most important nature.

Mervyn was meanwhile abandoned to his reflections, in the silence and solitude of his cell, where the monk left him after a brief but sharp lecture, to which he replied not a word. He then threw himself on his pallet, where he lay in a state of moody desperation for nearly two hours. All the desolation and helplessness of his condition rushed upon him; his orphan childhood, deserted by all who should have loved and cherished him; his hopeless dependance; the irresistible force of the appearances against him; the shame which awaited him before those proud nobles, who would rejoice in the humiliation of the *roturier;*—all these thoughts combined nearly drove him frantic; and still the calm and lovely moonlight, as if mocking his misery, flowed through the narrow casement of his cell, filling it with shadowy light. The extremes of joy and sorrow alike make men indifferent to death; for in such moments it seems as if all the objects of existence were filled and cloyed, and that to live longer were

only to occupy a dreary vacancy in thought and feeling. Mervyn was almost astonished at his own hardness when he found he could not weep, but sat with dry eyes gazing around, and all but wishing he had some means of self-destruction, by which to escape the unutterable ignominy which he thought awaited him.

This gloomy revery was disturbed by the sudden creaking of his door, and turning, not without a hope that it might be Van Huysman, he beheld the short clumsy figure of Oates, wrapped in a dark cassock, and seemingly tightly strapped up with divers little packages, as if for a journey. He entered with a stealthy step, putting his finger to his lips, and carrying his shoes in his hand, as if to move more noiselessly. Mervyn would have spoken, and probably in no very complimentary tone, but Oates whispered, "For your own sake, speak not!" and closed the door carefully after him.

"What do you want with me, villain! have you your knife?" said Mervyn, recklessly. "Murder me if you like—I do not care—you have already slain my noblest part, my honour!"

"I come to save you, foolish boy," said Oates,

quickly. "What is honour? The skin of an onion—peel off one and there's another below. To be sure you have no longer an honour in St. Omer, but there's one spick and span new for you in England, whither I am going. Will you accompany me? Choose!"

"But how! it is impossible?" said Mervyn, eagerly.

"By no means, not at all, when a man flies from such a bad possibility, or rather certainty," said Oates. "For ensample, it is certain that to-morrow you and I are to be publicly examined, condemned, shamed before these sanctified hypocrites, and these young sneering gentry, who will hiss us to death with scorn. Flight is our only resource; flight, and to England! There the mystery of your birth may be solved, or you may acquire such renown as will hide it in a blaze of glory. I have friends in England who will protect you for my sake: dare you accompany me?"

"I have no money, no friends, no hope in the world!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"I have all, and you shall share them," said Oates, clinking a well-stocked purse in Mervyn's

ear. "I tell you it in secresy, and because I know you cannot betray me—the Lord Shaftesbury is my protector, my patron, and shall be yours."

"But how can we escape?" said Mervyn.

"Leave that to me; do but follow; every moment is precious," replied Titus.

"But these garbs will betray us wherever we are seen; we shall be brought back with shame!"

"No, no, I tell you! we will give out that we are novices exercising our month's humility by begging ere we profess," replied Oates, very eagerly. "In short, either follow me, or stay behind to suffer all the shame and dishonour which can be heaped on human head by priestly malice."

"Oh," said Mervyn, "I know not whether to fly or stay be the worse part to take."

"Flight at least escapes shame, public shame! Will you stay to be the butt of these sarcasmous young nobles, to whom justice and mercy are equally strangers?" replied Oates.

This suggestion gave Mervyn the strength of heart and energy of purpose which he lacked. When the mind is in such a state of doubt, swayed to and fro by a thousand different and opposing motives and feelings, a single bold word or asser-

tion is often sufficient to fix the balance—at least so long as to produce a degree of action which forces on its own conclusion. Besides, he was too much hurried, confused, and tossed in mind, by fears and conjectures full of terror, to reason calmly on the dangerous step he was about to take. He assented, therefore, hastily; seized the few articles which Oates suggested, and also the cross which the padre had given him, and in a few moments he was following that worthy on tiptoe down the dark corridor.

Oates led the way breathlessly back to his own cell, and motioning Mervyn to follow his example, got on a stool, opened the lattice, and pushed himself with slight difficulty out, dropping some few feet into the garden below. Mervyn then, at his desire, threw a bundle after him, and easily followed.

They were now in the garden of the convent, which was richly cultivated, and seemed balmy and beautiful as a mimic Eden, under the serene light of the moon. Mervyn looked sadly round, and the sweet dewy scent of the flowers seemed like the voices of familiar friends, imploring him not to desert them for ever. He looked up at the little oriel win-

dow of Van Huysman's closet, which was high in the dark pile of building, and perceived a light still burning in it, by which he knew that the father had not gone to rest. Compunctious visitings of remorse strained hard at his heart, and recollections of what a blow his conduct would inflict on him and on the venerable Oliva, almost unnerved his resolution. But it was too late to repent. Oates commanded him to hasten, in a tone of harsh control, such as he had never yet ventured to use, and dragged rather than led him through a little orchard which conducted to the walls enclosing the convent grounds. These walls, though of considerable height, were densely clothed in ivy, so that they easily clambered to the top, dropped deftly down, and immediately set forward at a very rapid rate on the road to Calais.

CHAPTER XV.

WHIGS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

It is not necessary to follow our fugitives step by step to England. They found few obstacles, and none which Oates's cunning or cash did not obviate. They procured a passage in a Dutch trader, and landed on a bright summer's morning at Wapping, a district purposely chosen by Oates as the most suitable to his objects.

As it was by no means safe to appear among the puritan population of London in a Jesuit garb, Oates changed it immediately an opportunity offered after landing. He then ordered Mervyn to follow, in the

tone of a master addressing his servant, or rather slave, and set off to a quarter on the river side, inhabited principally by Jews and old salesmen. Indeed, during the whole voyage, Mervyn had remarked a wonderful change come over his companion's manners, not gradually, but from the very first moment in which he had trusted himself so foolishly to his protection. All his hypocritical softness, his flatterings and cajolings, had changed into a harsh imperious insolence, which every moment revolted Mervyn's proud spirit. But bitterly as he began to repent the step he had taken, the youth felt that it was too late to retract, and that moneyless and friendless as he was, he had no resource but to submit, at least until he saw some feasible means of extrication.

Oates probably guessed that some such ideas were passing in his mind, for he looked round at times with a watchful eye, and as they plunged deeper into the dark mazes of the shore, he seemed to relax his new-blown dignity. At last he called Mervyn to him, and affably leaning on his shoulder, asked him how he liked London, and whether it seemed to him so gorgeous a city as he had imagined. Mervyn frankly allowed that nothing satisfied his expectations except the river, crowded with its forests of masts, and

seeming to unload the treasures of the whole earth on its wharfs.

"You will live to see a more splendid portion of the city of London," said Oates, with a grin. "This city is the Sodom of the west, which God's great judgments of plague and fire have in vain striven to cleanse. And even as the shores of this great city are foul and unseemly to look at, so are the beginnings of thy fortunes, which are now on the anvil of destiny; for being freed from these accursed paupistical trammels, you have only to bear a witness before men in His cause, to obtain all earthly and Heavenly rewards."

"Pray you, brother Titus, what mean you?" said Mervyn, puzzled with this new and ponderous style.

"Never dare to call me by that idolatrous title again, boy!" said Oates, fiercely. "I am Doctor Titus Oates, a humble professor of the Christian evangele of the church of England." But observing that Mervyn looked at him with a remarkable expression, he added more mildly, "Nathless, take courage, boy; fight the good fight, and your crown shall be everlasting light. I do intend, and that presently, to lead you before the great and generous loard whereof I spoke."

Mervyn made no reply, but these words broke a confused light into his mind, and he began to imagine that brother Titus was but a wolf in sheep's clothing, and that he had been lured from the flock for no very advantageous purposes, which, however, he could not yet clearly divine. Absorbed in very unpleasant revery, he followed Oates in all his meanders through the dingy alleys surrounding the Tower, until they arrived at a broker's, with whom Oates seemed well acquainted. Here they purchased some very decent second-hand apparel, which Oates cheapened to almost half the price demanded. He purchased for himself a costume which Mervyn at first did not understand, but which he afterwards knew was that of a doctor of divinity. It consisted of a black gown, a plain collar, waistband, and cap with ears, all cut in the most formal and stiff style possible. Mervyn had a suit of very sombre colours, fit for an apprentice in a puritannical family of the period, when not only the broad distinctions between citizen and courtier were exhibited in the style of dress, but almost every shade of religious opinion was so indicated.

Thus handsomely fitted out, Oates no longer avoided the great thoroughfares, but took his way

through the heart of the bustling city. Mervyn was delighted and dazzled by the splendour and riches which burst for the first time on his monastic eyes, and gazed in silent bewilderment at the glittering wares, the curious signs over the shops and booths, the dark-clad burghers moving with solemn pride through their wealthy marts, and richly bedizened courtiers ruffling it haughtily past. The very serving-men in their flaunting liveries shared his admiration, and even the sad-coloured garbs of the puritans, and other sorrowful relics of the Cromwellian times, by which they were less distinguished than by their long hard-boned visages, excited his eager curiosity.

The city, as we now emphatically call it, was only beginning to lose its palmy dignity as the royal residence, and was still the haunt of fashion as of commerce. The enormous warehouses had not yet usurped the glittering line of shops and party-coloured booths, where all that wealth and luxury could demand were collected by the toils of half the globe. The palaces of the nobility were mingled, as in the middle ages, with the merchants' marts, and the Tower itself was occasionally honoured by the presence of the king and court. Consequently, the

scenes they now traversed were full of objects likely to kindle and gratify the curiosity of a boy like Mervyn, educated in such seclusion. Every gilded coach, as it rolled past with its pageantry of hanging and running footmen, raised his admiration, and many a wild romance shaped itself in his fancy, as the rich sedan, carefully closed, bore its burden past, or some masked beauty tripped lightly from it, followed by her stalwart footmen with their gilded wands.

These agreeable objects quickly chased Mervyn's gloomy anticipations, and splendid visions, such as he had dreamed at St. Omer, succeeded in rainbow-coloured masses. This illusion was broken by the harsh tones of his conductor, who bade him suddenly halt; and looking up, he found himself before a huge, irregular pile of buildings extending a great distance down a court to his right, and facing Aldersgate-street. This, as Oates briefly explained, was Thanet House, the residence of the Earl of Shaftesbury, whom the court accused of fixing his abode there to carry on a more uninterrupted intercourse with the city, then the great strength of the Whig or country party. Oates knocked, and a tall porter in very rich livery made his appearance; he

inquired if his lordship was at home "to a humble servant of the suffering church, Dr. Oates." The porter replied that the earl had visiters with him, but that he doubted not his reverence would be welcome; and he commissioned a lackey to inquire, while another guided the doctor and Mervyn into a waiting-room, where they were left.

At the period at which our story has now arrived, the great masses of the people were firmly persuaded that a laborious policy, or rather conspiracy, was at work, to consummate the ruin of the constitution and of the protestant church, by introducing popery, as it was called, and arbitrary government, on the detested model of France.

This conviction had obtained a deep and settled possession of the public mind, and, as subsequent events proved, it was but too well founded. The political horizon was black with the impending tempest, though no man could with certainty predict from what point it would burst. But Oates, or rather the great party which used him as its instrument, had long since decided that it should be from that quarter which would collect again all the scattered thunderbolts of the commonwealth, and lash to madness that wild ocean of fanaticism which had

so long slumbered as if beneath the wand of an enchanter. And this lightning was to be brought down from Heaven itself. Religion, which had broken so many chains, was again to be invoked from her starry throne, to wave the sword and the torch over mankind.

Different and even opposed as were the wishes and intentions of the various existing factions, all were united on certain great points by the skill and energy of a great political leader, a man born to be the master spirit of a stormy crisis, such as that which was fast approaching. The "false Achitophel" of Dryden, that Shaftesbury whose name seems the type of the bold, restless, Machiavellian policy which sprung from the sanguinary school of Richelieu, and adapting itself to the milder forms of the age, still did not scruple to employ violent means under a darker disguise—Shaftesbury was at this period the great idol of popularity, the head of the parliamentary opposition to Charles, the centre of all the intrigues against the government. His talents, reckless daring, and unscrupulous morality, his personal hatred of the king and his brother, eminently qualified him for the tempestuous pilotage he had assumed; and his keen sarcastic wit, vehement ora-

tory, and perfect knowledge of the men and motives of his time, rendered him almost unique as a popular leader. The insults and wrongs he had suffered from the court, which had only used him as a tool, his degradation from the chancellorship which he had held with high reputation, and his recent imprisonment in the Tower, had raised him, in spite of his many shiftings and changes, to the rank of a popular martyr, and at the same time exasperated his inborn restlessness and impatience of control with the venom of personal and rancorous malignity.

The real wishes and objects of Shaftesbury are still a mystery, for they were so multifarious and changeable that no man can with certainty judge them, even in the silence of all those great passions and interests which have gone to repose with the turbulent generation that bred them. That he desired to see no power greater than his own is probable, for it was impossible for him to rest under any yoke; and the commonwealth men, the broken soldiery and discontented republicans of the Cromwell era, looked at him as their leader in the fierce strife for which they were silently bracing their loins.

On the other hand the moderate party, who

wished to see a monarchical but strictly constitutional government in England, followed Shaftesbury's counsels with blind zeal; and the still smaller faction, who chose the young Duke of Monmouth as their head, and aspired to thrust him on the throne, also regarded him as their chief support. The principles of his youth, and the destructive tendencies of his own impetuous character, inclined Shaftesbury to the re-establishment of the republic; but a still more absorbing hatred of the Duke of York, whom he believed to be the author of his disgrace, inclined him to support the pretensions of the Duke's hated rival.

The dreamers and enthusiasts of the old religious parties who thought to establish a theocracy on earth, in imitation of that of Moses; the wild fanatics of the fifth monarchy scheme; the discontented dregs of the royalists; and even the timorous and wavering of the Catholic party, were all united by his singular and Protean art of infusing himself into all men's passions and motives. Thus was constituted a solid and powerful engine, wielded by the activity of one mind, which finally crushed all resistance; for the temporary success of Charles II.

against his parliament was but the lull which preceded the earthquake of 1688.

It must not be supposed, however, that the clouds which were gathering rose from nought, at the command of a magician, and that the direful phantasmagoria which was shortly to be made visible by the fiendish glare of Oates's discoveries, were merely chimeras and shadows of unsubstantial horrors. A plot no doubt existed, though not in the sense and form given to it by the authors and supporters of the popish plot; it was a plan or conspiracy having for its object the overthrow of the great heresy which had so long rent the church, and the restoration of the dominion of the ancient religion. The impossibility of accomplishing this object with a free parliament, and without the assistance of military power, was the reason which, no doubt, induced the Jesuits to embrace the idea of establishing an arbitrary government as the basis of their operations. The general and established opinion of their intentions furnished Oates, and his fellow-monsters, with the ground-work of their plot, and took away all defence and disproof from the government, which neither dared nor could impugn

the imaginary, without allowing the real conspiracy.

It was upon the threshold of these terrible storms of state that Mervyn sat tranquilly and unconsciously down, awaiting a summons which, though he knew it not, was the call of his destiny.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHAFTESBURY AND HIS COLLEAGUES.

THE lackey despatched from Oates returned with a promptness which showed that the arrival was one by no means to be slighted, and desired them to follow to his lordship's presence. They ascended a richly-carved oaken staircase, terminated by a portal of the same materials, which swung open, and revealed an extensive library of finely-bound books. This apartment was furnished with massive elegance, and ornamented with many articles of virtu.

In a deep recess, formed by a bay window, was a table, spread with wine and comfits, at which sat three gentlemen one of whom—a small but well-

shaped man, very richly dressed, and with a very acute and intellectual cast of physiognomy, illumined by an eye of singular brilliancy—rose to greet them as they entered. The other gentlemen kept their seats. One of these was a dull, heavy-looking divine, with a fat credulous face, and two little eyes deeply imbedded in the sockets. The other was evidently a man of great quality, from his dress, which nevertheless had a careless rakish appearance, not contradicted by the worn-out expression of a countenance, once extremely handsome, but now pale and sunken with excess. The extravagance of his dress did not, in this instance, dazzle Mervyn's judgment, for in the first glance he caught of the stranger, he thought he detected something evil and sinister, which kindled a great dislike in his bosom.

"Honest, worthy Master Oates, true seeker of the manna, eschewing self, welcome home from St. Omer," exclaimed the earl, shaking Titus's hand with extreme cordiality. "But softly; we have heard you are dubbed doctor—welcome home then, worthy doctor!"

"I thank your lordship in all humility," replied

Oates, abjectly bending. "I am here in good sooth, and glad to be out of the jaws of the whale. But whom have we here, my loard?—all safe?"

"Why, Gad-a-mercy, the light dazzles you, brother," said the earl. "See you not?—a true champion of the cause, my Lord Howard of Escrick, and the blessed expounder of the word, whose labours have been crowned with such increase, Dr. Tongue."

"Ah, Master Oates—what, Dr. Oates—welcome home!" exclaimed both gentlemen, springing eagerly up. Oates and his recognised friends embraced with seeming heartiness, and mutual recognitions having taken place, Lord Howard filled a goblet with a trembling hand, which he pushed to Oates, exclaiming, "Drink, boy, drink, and rest thy carcass, and tell us the news."

"Ay, sit, good doctor," said Shaftesbury, smiling. "I had small hopes to welcome you home so scatheless from the den of wolves—I did fear that even your tough heart might fail in the good but perilous fight."

"My strength was from above!" replied Oates, meekly. "I glory not in my work, though it be well done; 'tis none of mine. It was the cause, my

loard—the cause of a mightier than I, whose shoe-latch I am not worthy to fasten—that supported me through all my trials."

"Ay, without such holy motives we should never get through half the sin of this world, doctor," said the earl, with a slight sneer. "But have you gathered any fuel for the fire—any useful information which may serve to set this wronged and deluded nation on its guard?"

"Know you aught of this most dreadful plot against our lives and liberties whereof you warned us, even as a shepherd placed on a high rock shouteth to the herd on the precipice?" said Dr. Tongue, with an awestruck look at the venerable Titus.

"Oh, my loard, such a dreadful ploat has not been discovered since wicked Haman's," said Oates, turning his eyes up. "All our throats are to be cut, and the accursed popish superstitious idolatry brought in, over the carcass of Magna Charta and all our liberties."

"Why then—there will be many a rogue the less in a world that can well spare them," said Shaftesbury, with a satirical smile. "But what boy is this, doctor, whom you have brought in your

skirts and apparently forgotten. Is he a young prophet—your Elisha?"

"Nay, my loard, but a poor novice of St. Omer, whom I have brought over to the true faith, and who is anxious to serve your lordship," replied Oates.

"Marry, Oates, he may be useful in cases that need two witnesses—in the swearing drudgery," said the earl, eyeing Mervyn with a penetrating gaze. "Yet, 'slife! by that proud blush, I doubt you have scarce hit on the right nail. Are you willing to be of service to me, youth?"

"In all matters that may be without prejudice to my religion and honour," said Mervyn, sharply and even haughtily, for he was both surprised and disgusted with the strange assertion which Oates had made, though he dared not contradict it openly.

"Marry, 'tis a lad of mettle—what name may you give him, doctor?" said Lord Howard, who had been gazing for some minutes in deep and gloomy attention at the youth.

"They call him Mervyn, a poor church foundling, son of some wild robber executed at St. Omer, and indebted to the crafty brothers of the college

for life and education," said Titus, with a malignant smile at his victim.

"Ay, is it so?" said Howard, his complexion darkening; "I did think—but no matter. He is fitter for our work." And he drew his hand slowly over his brow, as if to wipe away some unpleasant recollection, then turned and swallowed a deep gulp of wine.

"Trouble not at thy parentage, youth," said the earl, observing the passions which struggled in Mervyn's countenance. "The greatest conquerors that have ever been were but successful robbers of mankind, and the founders of dynasties have all been traitors to humanity itself. Well!—for the present, Oates, I leave him in your service. I know not where he may better serve a 'prenticeship to mine. And now, man, what new facts have you discovered of this royal treason? Is there aught direct against the Duke of York?"

"Most monstrous certainties, my loard, since I can clearly convict his secretary, Coleman, of a treasonable correspondence with France!" replied Oates, vehemently.

"The duchess's secretary now," said the earl. "And thereupon I would advise you to be cautious

how you fill up your great outlines, for it is on little matters that great ones hinge, and the discovery of a mistake in the smallest portion of your evidence will furnish your enemies with a battering ram against the whole."

"Trust me, my loard, I shall ever have my crook raised, as one who expects the wolf," replied Oates, with a knowing look. "But here is the brief extract or epitome of that which I have already discovered, and will, please God, sartify before the king and mighty of the land, even as holy Daniel in the presence of idolatrous Belshazzar, feasting on gold and purple, and turning the sacred utensils into vessels of abomination and iniquity. But methinks it were not amiss if the young acolyte, seeing he is as it were green and tender in the affairs of this world, do retire to yonder recess, where he may find sweet nutriment for thought in the precious tomes which your loardship's taste and generosity have collected."

Mervyn gladly took the hint, for he was embarrassed with the keen observation of Shaftesbury, and bowing slightly, crossed the room to the spot indicated. It was a richly-carved alcove, separated from the library by long curtains, which might be drawn at pleasure, so as to seclude the inmate, and

was furnished with various luxurious appliances of study. He seated himself at a desk, on which lay an open volume of Lucretius, and seemed to be soon absorbed in the perusal, though from time to time he glanced at the opposite group with involuntary curiosity.

Oates continued speaking, for his thick, harsh voice was audible in an uninterrupted course, though the words were not sufficiently clear to make any sense to Mervyn. This was the more provoking, as what he said seemed to excite the most anxious attention in his hearers, and Dr. Tongue's foolish face was all agape with amazement. Oates's hypocritical countenance seemed also the index of a wondrous tale; but as the earl listened, an incredulous smile was lurking on his lips. Oates then appeared to produce his vouchers, and handed certain letters to his patron, which Mervyn had little doubt were part of those stolen at St. Omer. Shaftesbury took them with avidity, and Mervyn remarked a beam of joy light his sallow countenance as he murmured the contents over to his companions.

"This indeed strikes home!" he said, rising and stepping forward, as if the restlessness of his ambitious nature required even physical action. "This

indeed strikes home!—my Lord Howard, what say you? Is not here a thunderbolt which, skilfully forged, will waken the nation from its lethargy, and shake the throne of this licentious Jupiter of ours?"

"Methinks 'tis high time, now that our religion and constitution are in such mortal pass and jeopardy," replied his lordship, carelessly.

"Faith, Howard, for *our* religion and constitution, methinks they can incur no further damage," said Shaftesbury, smiling.

"Verily these tidings will summon Israel as with a roar of brazen trumpets and drums," said Dr. Tongue.

"Yes, we shall live to shake the throne of the mock Nero," continued the earl, walking up and down in triumph. "The nation may yet be saved, and the glorious heritage our ancestors bought with their blood may be transmitted intact to our children. But, Oates, look that your tale be well told—and yet it rings like good metal. This design of the papists on the king's life—the resolution to place his brother on the throne, in order to introduce popery and to set parliaments aside since their consent could not be obtained—combined with Coleman's cravings for money from France to raise an

Irish army—are all admirable. But how will you prove it, doctor?"

"I will swear it, my loard!" replied Oates, energetically.

"Ay, ay; but will folks believe us?" said Shaftesbury, with a peculiar glance of his glittering eye.

"Why, my loard, have I not seen, heard, felt this accursed ploat?—have I not lived among the villanous Jesuits, listened at their doors, been at their consultations, carried messages, intercepted letters—"

"Why, sooth, you are the very bell-wether of black sheep—a white Judas!" interrupted the earl. "But we shall need some strong support, lest the king crush our discovery by some sudden exertion of prerogative, and then adieu, dear Doctor Oates, to your nose and ears?"

"What needs, more than your lordship's and other good pautriots?" said Titus, with a somewhat dismayed glance around.

"And, my good lord, methinks the nation is already well-primed, and needs but a spark to bring out such an explosion as—as will blow this arbitrary court, and Popery and the Duke of York, and what

not, to the devil?" said the Lord Howard, sipping his wine to fill up divers little pauses of hesitation. "But how and when and where shall we commence?" continued he. "'Slife, I am weary of the common side of the hedge, and would be again among the clover. Besides, I am vexed and stung by those damnable gadflies, a man's creditors."

"Do you and Dr. Tongue, Oates, accost the king on his morning walk," said the earl. "Or, stay—Tongue knows one Kirby, a foolish chemist, who is oft admitted to the honour of cleaning his majesty's crucibles, and preparing some of those wonderful experiments of his, at which the court ladies clap their little hands, and cry la! What if he proposed the matter to the king?"

"What if all of us unitedly? I would not seem behind in my duty to the king's majesty, but this is a service for which he will thank no man," said Dr. Tongue, warmly.

"Ay, ay, doctor, 'tis known you have half an eye on the rich deanery of Wells, which is now held on the tenure of an apoplexy," said the earl, with his tart smile. "But, Oates, revealed only to the king, your discoveries may be stifled in the

throes of bringing forth, wherefore we must also have it publicly deposed before some zealous magistrate, who will see it have fair play for life."

"Ay, indeed. What says your lordship to the godly and worshipful Master Bethel? he is a true servant of the cause," said Oates.

"A greedy curmudgeon! he did deny me a paltry hundred guineas on my own security," muttered the Lord Howard.

"No, no, not Bethel; he is too eager and headstrong," said Shaftesbury. "He would push the matter before its parts are fitted and coherent; it needs time to harden; and besides, I would not have it brought out too far before the Parliament assembles, and we have had time to study its temper. No, take your deposition before Sir Edmundbury Godfrey in Westminster. 'Twill seem the more impartial, as men rumour he is rather inclined to the papishers and court."

"My loard, I will obey you in all things, for as Gideon was sent by God to rally his scattered peoples—" began Oates, when the earl sharply interrupted him.

"Obey me! Not so, Mr. Oates!" he said. "I do think that in this transaction you follow the dictates

of your own conscience, but, mark! no advice nor instigation of mine. I will have nothing to do with the midwifery of this discovery; but bring it forth, and perchance I shall prove a good gossip at the christening."

"Nay, good truth, but your loardship, as head of the true Magna Charta church party, cannot but support me in my discovery of this horrid, bloody, and execrable ploat?" said Oates, very humbly.

"I shall in no respect be wanting in my duty to my country," replied the earl. "But you know me, Oates. I am not fond of working in the dark wheels of other men's contrivances. We must not appear to understand each other, or it will ruin all. What if they bring evidence to prove you were at St. Omer at these times when you say you were in England?"

"Paupish evidence, my loard, which is not to be suffered," said Oates, grinning. "Besides, I have this boy to swear I was not there till—till I choose."

"I tell you again, you have mistaken your drudge; there is some gentleman's blood in his veins," said Shaftesbury, thoughtfully.

"And how pale he looks, hanging over that book," said Howard; "as if he had been debauching it last

night with me at that drink-bushel Monmouth's! Is he hungry? Do you starve him, Oates, as Bethel does his cook? Odd's life! that puts me in mind 'tis noonday, Shaftesbury, and we are to dine with my Lord Russel, Sydney, and the other country people."

"Faith were we," said the earl, rising, "wherefore I must make scant manners with you, Doctor Oates, and bid you farewell until such time and place as I shall appoint, so soon as I shall have heard you are afloat."

Oates rose too, and bowing profoundly, shook Tongue's hand, which was extended in eager friendship towards him.

"But I have forgotten a small matter," said the earl, drawing Oates aside. "How are you off for the king's portraits, old boy? Ha, wouldst dislike this small nest o' em?"

"Owing to your lordship's liberality, I lack nothing," replied Titus, condescending, however, to take the offered purse.

"Nay, nay, you must not want," said Shaftesbury, with a smile. "If the state knows not how to honour virtue, I do; and thereby honour myself. Young man," he added, turning to Mervyn, whom Oates had beckoned out of his studio, "I see you

are of rising metal; do but what this worthy gentleman tells you, and you will live to see great things."

Mervyn choked the reply which rose to his lips, with some difficulty; and after the usual ceremonies of adieu, the worthy Oates marched off with his young coadjutor.

"There he goes for a most pestilent liar, thief, and demagogue," exclaimed Howard, almost as the door swung on his heels. "I do marvel your lordship will have any thing to do with such a vicious, perjured, blasphemous, foul-mouthed, monstrous—"

"Egad, brother, you would not have me clean a pigsty with a silver fork!" interrupted the earl. "The man is fit for his work, and his work for the man, and, as the saints say, did not the end sanctify the means I could be loth to——but it is dinner-hour, and we must not keep my Lord Russel's stately lady waiting."

And the politicians moved off together, leaving Dr. Tongue to finish the bottles alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAINT OATES.

After this satisfactory interview, Oates left Thanet House in a state little short of ecstasy, and Mervyn shared the genial effects of his good-humour. He leaned patronizingly on his arm, and began talking with him very familiarly, asking him how he liked the earl, his mansion, and the splendid dress of the Lord Howard. "You see, child," he said with swelling importance, "I have not deceived you; I am a man of some little consequence in England, and may turn out more than you yet dream, boy."

"But what is all this coil about; these strange

metamorphoses, these unlicensed assertions in which you deal, Mr. Oates?" said Mervyn, hastily; for little as he had overheard of the late scene, and small as his knowledge of the world most certainly was, the high rank of the personages, and much of Oates's conduct, filled him with suspicion and inquietude.

"I cannot and will not explain aught at present, child," said brother Titus, after a glance of rat-like alarm at the youth. "But know that I—that I—Taitus Oates, will soon be as much dictator of this great nation as ever was Sylla of the Roman state. In my hands shall be the judgment of life and death, triumph or defeat. You have but to support me, child, and your fortune is made."

Leaving his young victim time to ruminate on these strange anticipations, Oates plunged into a chaos of entangled alleys and by-streets, whence he emerged in the Strand, near St. Clement's. He proceeded a short distance, and arrived before a silversmith's shop, which displayed a scanty set-out of glittering wares in the window, and suddenly entered. There was a large, fat, and eminently foolish-looking man sitting at work with an ill-looking pug-nosed apprentice, chasing some ornaments for

a fruit-basket. Oates's entrance caused them both to look up, and the master's countenance underwent a curious succession of changes, from a very deep and evidently disagreeable surprise to a forced expression of delight.

"Good lard! Mr. Oates? who'd a-thought it?" he exclaimed, and, as the fashion of the day was, locking his visiter in a fraternal embrace. This was followed by an earnest invitation into his little back-parlour, which, coupled with an assurance that he was just going to dine, proved irresistible.

"Well, and where have you been so long, forgetting all your old friends?" said the silversmith, when he had comfortably established his visiters in immense oak chairs.

"Oh, among the Jesuits, raking out all their execrable practices—but you will soon hear more, Master Prance," replied Oates, significantly.

"Well, but in good truth, things are tending very much that way," said Prance, with an attempt at the style jocular. "He-he! they say now that the short road to Rome is by Oxford. 'Slids, Master Oates, I do sometimes think of turning papisher myself, for that's the cork to swim with nowadays.

And what a fine religion that is for gold and silversmiths' work! For my part, I don't care how soon it comes in. All I can say is, times can't be worse, protestant as they are. Do but look here, what beautiful gold work I am beating into this choice Genoa velvet, for the queen's chapel."

"The mantle of the Scarlet Woman of Babylon!" exclaimed Oates. "Oh, brother Prance, I am grieved to hear you talk so far adrift. What is all this pomp but leaven of earth, fleshpots of Egypt, vapours from the nostrils of Satan? But what are the news at home, for I am but just landed?—How is your worthy lady? I trust her soul prospers."

"Ay, and her body too; she grows fatter and fatter every day," said Prance, with a melancholy smile. "Ay, and rules the roast still, Mr. Oates, I warrant me. Her soul, quotha! She saved that long ago, or there's no salvation to be had for love or money."

"She was indeed a zealous seeker of the manna, and with a blessing from above, I have often assisted her to find it," replied Oates, piously. "Well, well, I am glad to hear she is fat; it looks like good keeping, Master Prance."

"Adzooks! it's as much as I can do to keep her and her retinue of canting soul-savers!" exclaimed Prance, hastily.

"Ay, indeed; and who is her principal spiritual adviser at present?" said Oates, his complexion darkening.

"Marry, now, be not jealous, in a ghostly sense," said Prance, laughing. "For since you left us, Master Oates, she hath run from light to light, from teacher to teacher, without any constancy, and complains that the pillar of fire is vanished from the wilderness, and that she stumbles in her ways."

"Poor soul!" said Oates, with a grim smile. "Well, Master Prance, let us have your merriest news first."

"Nay, the prettiest I wot of, is concerning a crafty adventure of Claude Duval's," said the silversmith, laughing. "I do marvel at that fellow, and how he hath so long eluded law and justice."

"So do not I, seeing he is so unchary of his cash, that he hath always a friend in need," replied Oates. "Mind you not of the time at Salisbury, when he and the catchpoles got drunk together, and he escaped in one of their apparels? Marry, he served me a scurvy trick many years agone,

when he was but commencing his villanies; but I have long since Christianly forgiven him, for certain considerations. We should not quarrel now if we met—unless I had a troop of dragoons at my elbow."

"Is Claude Duval a famous robber?" said Mervyn, somewhat eagerly.

"Yea, and what is that to you, boy?" replied Oates, with a suspicious glance at him. "Doth it seem to you as if every thief were a relation of yours?"

Mervyn looked confused and was silent.

"Nay, brother," interposed Prance, "but what trick did he play you?—his tricks are all so merry."

"Tut! I have forgotten and forgiven it!—He robbed me in the forest of Clairvaux—he didn't get much by it, though," said Oates, with a chuckling laugh. "But what new trick is this he hath played?"

"Oh, la, so mighty funny, 'twere enough to make a skeleton grin," said the silversmith. "You know old avaricious Bethell, that was the famous sheriff—And behold you last week comes a letter from one of his correspondents in Darby, offering him a wonderful bargain in sheepskins, but, forsooth, he must go well provided with cash—hard cash. Off he goes, and for saving, without any attendant, on an

old horse, with a heavy bag of gold; and between Darby and Ashby, on the moor there, what meets him but Mr. Duval, who makes him surrender all he has—and when he goes to Darby, light of his bags, he finds me out that his correspondent knows no more about sheepskins than the mutton, and it was all a trick of Duval's—ha, ha!"

"But they say he is mighty courteous and civil to his prisoners," said Oates, joining the laugh, despite his assumed gravity; "in especial to the ladies wherein he is a Frenchman to the backbone."

"Agad, that he is," said Prance, wiping his eyes, which ran over with mirth. "Have you heard what passed between him and beautiful Mistress Aurora Sydney?—My lord Leicester, some few months ago, was coming to town in his coach-and-six, with his footmen and flambeau-men and what not, and his lady granddaughter, mistress Aurora, with him. She was coming to the court to be presented, on occasion of being named maid of honour to the queen, at the personal request of the Lord Shaftesbury, just before he was knocked out of office—he-he-he!—but that's neither here nor there. Well, well, as I was saying—Claude Duval and a lot of his fine fellows meets 'em on Hounslow, as sure as a

ghost, and there was nothing for it but stand and deliver. And when Claude looks in the coach, seeing such a charming young lady in it (for they say she beats even Mistress Stuart, and my Lady Castlemaine is a fool to her), what does he do but insist on dancing a minuet with her! And in spite of all her ifs and ans, out she must upon the heath, and it being a fine moonlight night, foot it away for a highwayman's pleasure. But I have heard Jack, the coachman, say, he danced as solemnly as any courtier, with his hat under his arm; and she being a witty pleasant lady, was so taken with the mirth of the thing, that she danced as if with his Majesty. And after the minuet, he hands her safely back to my lord, who was nigh bursting with rage, and saying he could not think of robbing so perfect a lady of her adornments, gives her back a casket which contained her jewels; and away they go without further molestation."

"A marvellous pretty tale, an it be true," said Oates, with an uneasy glance at Mervyn. "But know you, brother, *por acaso*, as the Spaniard hath it, where Colonel Sydney now is?"

"In England, but rather under cover," said Prance. "He hath not yet obtained formal permis-

sion to appear, but he came back to attend the old earl's deathbed, and is now in a sort of hide and seek at Lord Howard's house, who is his special friend."

"Ay, indeed! and prithee, are there any news concerning that persecuted protestant, Colonel Blood? Is he still at hide and seek with the law, about that affair of the Duke of Ormonde?"

"Yes, and dare not be seen for his life," said the silversmith, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, Mr. Oates, that was a terrible affair! My Lord Ossory swears to make mincemeat of him wherever they meet; and though Blood cares as little for threats as any man, there is a warrant out, and a reward of a thousand guineas for his apprehension. I warrant me, he is in some of his old lurking-places in Whitefriars; but here comes dinner, by my nose—boiled beef, boiled beef, Mr. Oates! and here comes Goody Prance in all her bravery."

Mrs. Prance entered as he spoke. She was a tall, fat, jolly woman, very fair and well conditioned, with a little pouting sensual mouth, good colour, and excellent eyes. She was dressed irresistibly, in her Sunday kirtle and a handsome sacque, with

a huge chain of blue stones crimping into her fat neck, and with her hair very finely curled, powdered, and scented.

The greeting between Oates and this fair lady was edifying, from its affectionate eagerness, and the large blush which overspread her vast bosom and cheeks, as Oates squeezed her hand in silence for several moments, while she poured forth her acknowledgments for the honour of his visit.

They now sat down to a hearty substantial repast, in the olden style, beef with suet dumplings, and such small matters as Mrs. Prance had hastily cooked up for the distinguished guest; and strong ale and brandy, which had the additional zest, as Prance whispered, of being contraband. Oates ate away at every thing before him with shark-like voracity, and seasoned the feast with deep draughts of the brown home-brewed, all the time discoursing, very lengthily and eloquently, about the state of religion, and the persecution which the church laboured under, and Mervyn thought at moments that the doctor's discourse had somehow or other a more earthly meaning, which Mrs. Prance understood. This was particularly remarkable at those times when Mr. Prance

was called out to attend some customer, though the dialogue still continued in that allegorical and mystic style affected by the saints of the period.

"Ah, sister Prance!" groaned Oates, on one of these occasions, "I do grieve to see how the withered leaves still hang on a fruitful vine, and that the unhappy paupistical blindness is still on that stray sheep, your husband, for all he hides it carefully under the veil of the ark, like a rotten sore covered with a golden plaster."

"Yes, verily, 'tis not in man or woman's wit to save a beam of wood from the burning temple, though it be of the cedar of Lebanon, worthy master Oates," replied the lady. "I'm sure I've tried, soul and body, and now he is unhappily hardened in his idolatries by the queen's giving him her Romish idols to make, and his belief that the Brazen Calf is once more to be set up among us."

"He will live to repent it, poor man!" sighed Oates.

"But you don't take a drop of any thing, doctor," said Mrs. Prance, filling his glass with brandy. "I am sorry as the widow of Sarepta, dear master, that I have nothing worthier of a prophet in Israel; but such as I have, is entirely at your service. But godly

master Oates, I do pray and hope on my bended knees, you will never breathe a word of my poor husband's prevarication, which I trusted to you in strict confidence, that, knowing where the shoe pinched him, you might apply spiritual salve and lint to his wounds."

"Heaven forbid! Madame Prance, Heaven forbid!" said Oates. "We will but weep and pray over him, and reveal not our cognizance of his frailty. But I am minded that I cannot indulge me longer in your company, for this season," said the reverend gentleman, after listening to a cuckoo clock over the fire—"it is nigh three o'clock, and I have calls on my time which even you do not understand, sister in love."

"Pooh, pooh, man, you'll stay and taste a dish of mulled sack I have warming," said honest Prance, who returned at this moment. "Why, there are some of the rarest apples roasted you ever caught sight of, all from the king's garden at Hampton."

But Oates, for some reason which he did not find it necessary to explain, declined even this genial invitation, and declaring his business admitted of no delay, took his departure. The usual greetings were exchanged, and once more Mervyn found himself

following his worthy master through the hot noonday streets, in great tribulation as to his own position and prospects. He was now convinced that he had committed a great but irreparable act of folly, in trusting himself to the protection of this false brother. Still he felt that any thing was better than the ignominy from which he thought his flight had saved him. His situation was nevertheless, even to one so young and thoughtless, sufficiently embarrassing. He beheld himself without friends or relations, in a strange country, in the power of a man who, to his extreme surprise, he found to be an apostate from the religion he professed, and who seemed engaged in dark and dangerous manœuvres, involving the greatest personages and events. But his moneyless condition forced him still to temporize; against which, as a matter of morality, his education among the Jesuitical casuists presented no obstacle. He however determined to seize the first opportunity which presented itself, to escape from the trammels of his hypocritical master.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A ROYAL REVEL.

On leaving Prance's house, Oates directed his course to the river, where he hired a sculler, ordering the boatman to convey them to Whitefriars, and land at Water-lane. Mervyn was of course ignorant of the evil fame of the locality, and if he had not been so, Oates was not in a humour to consult his opinions on the subject. Still he thought he had never seen any place that seemed a fitter receptacle for the offscum of fermenting multitudes, the sink of a great city's crimes and wretchedness.

The entrance of Water-lane was distinguished by a rude stone cross, marking the bounds of the sanc-

tuary, and near this, day and night, stood sentinel one of the Friars, as the refugees were called, with a horn at his girdle, to give the signal for mustering forces when any sheriff's officers made their appearance without a military force (which they seldom did), and then to give the alarm to their intended prey. Once past this sacred line of demarcation, a maze of dark narrow lanes, blind alleys, and courts very conveniently ending on the water, presented themselves to the bewildered stranger.

The population of this wild district was of a character extremely suitable to the haggard desperation of their local habitation. Whitefriars, or Alsatia, as it was called in the slang of the day, had reached its highest excess of nuisance under Charles II. as a sanctuary for all manner of crimes and lawless villanies. Fugitive debtors, murderers, and robbers—bad men and women of every shade of vice and misery—were there congregated, in open and almost secure defiance of the law. Debauchery of every kind rioted in undisturbed impunity. Brandy-shops, gaming-houses, and others of a still more revolting character, whence, night and day, issued the roar of ruffianly contention, ending not unfrequently in murder; a few shops, kept by Jews, devoted osten-

sibly to the sale of old rags and kitchen-stuff; and some filthy lanes in which a clamorous fish-market was carried on, seemed the only means of subsistence possessed by a part of the inhabitants; but the great majority lived no man knew how. Thieves and beggars who spent the day exercising their gifts in other parts of the metropolis, came here to roost at night, and scatter in debauchery what they had earned at the risk of their necks. Occasionally, however, might be seen the gaunt, withered frame, and threadbare garb of some unhappy debtor, forced to take refuge in this horrible place, from the fangs of his creditors. Nevertheless, this district, lawless as it appeared, was governed by certain regulations, which for the common good were rigidly enforced; among which was most remarkable the law by which all were bound to resist any invasion by justice, *vi et armis.*

Oates stopped before a public-house on the borders of the Temple, which had for sign a battered coat of arms over the gate, under which was hewn in stone—"The Heaven." But as it happened that this house, which was part of the ruined palace of the bishops of Salisbury, had escaped with little damage from the great fire, the pious owner had

added the title of "The Brand from the Burning." Oates paused a moment to adjust his coif, and the youth happening to raise his eyes, read with surprise the motto round the shield. "Esperance and advance, Mervyn!"

He pointed this name out to Oates, who said in a gruff tone, "Ay, ay, there are more Toms in York than one. Your rogue of a father gave you the name of a family he served, but henceforth I bestow upon you one more appropriate, and presume not to prick thine ears to any sound but Ichabod."

He then stalked majestically into the house, and was met by an hostess whose flushed face, disordered garb, and rakish eye bore tokens of recent inebriation. Nevertheless, she rejoiced in a name which promised better things, and was in truth our old friend, Temperance Bradley. Of her Oates inquired whether Mr. Butcherlaw were there.

"And what do you want with him, my master?" replied the hostess, eyeing him suspiciously. "If you mean to do any good with the colonel you should have brought a file of musketeers."

"I am his friend, good woman," said the doctor. "Why, Mistress Bradley, do you forget an old

friend in a new dress? or are you too proud to own him?"

"Good lackadaisy! Captain Oates in a parson's rind!" exclaimed she, cordially returning his salute. "What, on your tricks again? Well, if you must see him, he's upstairs drinking and boozing with some ruffling gallants of the court, come on purpose to see him now he's in trouble."

"Tell him, good madam, I must see him directly, alone, in your little back tap," said Oates, stepping on through some barrels into a little dark room, with the air of one familiar with the place; "and let them bring me a pint of your best red Canary, with a toast."

Mrs. Bradley nodded, and Oates closed the door on himself and his companion. Disgusted and weary with the day's occupation, Mervyn refused any share of the liquor, although Oates pressed him with a quaint smile, and seated himself moodily in the window-sill. He sat looking into a ruffianly court below, until Butcherlaw, or as the reader has perhaps divined, Colonel Blood, made his appearance.

Years had made little perceptible alteration in the

athletic frame of this worthy, but a good deal in his dress, for he was clad in a very worn and faded garb, though once of rich materials. His face was deeply flushed with wine, and he had altogether the look of one disturbed in some drunken debauch. Mervyn remarked that while he wrung Oates's hand with affected cordiality, he glanced around, and that as their eyes met, his complexion grew livid as lead. On his own part he felt an inconceivable dread at the mere sight of the man, which induced him to turn aside, and divert his unpleasant feelings by watching a fight between two ragged boys in the court below.

Meanwhile the two friends discoursed in a low key, and in a cant which Mervyn did not understand; but at last Oates turned to him, and said, "this is the young gentleman, Mr. Butcherlaw; this is Mr. Butcherlaw, Ichabod, who is a near relation of yours, and will tell you all about your parentage, when time serves. At present he is good enough to take you under his protection till we can do better for you."

The colour again forsook the colonel's countenance as Mervyn looked at him with extreme eager-

ness; but he muttered something about his satisfaction at the office, and wiped the dark dew from his brow with an ague-like shudder over his whole frame.

"Tell me then who is my father? is he alive?" said Mervyn, hastily.

"I have told you, sirrah, that this question is forbidden you at present," said Oates, severely. "In a short time the objection to telling you will be removed; till then you remain as I have said."

Mervyn felt strongly inclined to inquire by what right he was thus turned over to a stranger, but the bait thus artfully thrown out, and his own forlorn condition, deprived him of power. Oates then bestowed his blessing upon the boy, and observed to the colonel that he should take a sculler, and attend a godly meeting which he heard was to take place in Holborn fields."

"Tut, man, never lie to the devil," said Blood, coarsely. "Thou'lt deceive neither him nor me. Say at once thou art away to see thy old acquaintance, Mother Creswold!"

"Mr. Butcherlaw, you are in liquor," said Oates,

with dignity. "But you will be sober enough when we meet again."

And with a peculiar glance at Mervyn, the meaning of which he could not in the least fathom, he left the apartment.

"If ever the fiend took human form—" muttered Blood, but checking himself, he turned to Mervyn, and asked whether he had dined. Mervyn replied in the affirmative, but he remarked that the colonel watched him as he spoke with intense interest, and seemed rather listening to the sound of his voice than to what he said. He then took a turn or two in the room, and stopped abruptly. "Be of good cheer, youth," he said in a low tone. "I like your appearance, and will prove a better friend than most relations. Follow me; I mean to introduce you to some of the best society in England." And, with a swagger of no common significance, he strode up a narrow dark staircase, Mervyn following, though with considerable repugnance.

As they mounted, Mervyn distinguished sounds of loud merriment from above, a chorus of voices roaring out some bacchanal staves, to an accompaniment of clashing goblets and thumps on the table. Blood went first, and threw open the door of a large

apartment, battered and decayed, but evidently the relics of one of considerable magnificence. Indeed, it was a remnant of the episcopal palace, of whose ruins the inn consisted. There was a table in the middle covered with wine, fruit, dice, and a steaming bowl of punch, round which sat a number of gallants.

Mine host of the Heaven, large-nosed Simon Bradley, presided over the nectar, and was at the moment rolling in his chair, in a fit of laughter, caused by an observation of one of the guests, a tall, dark, muscular man, dressed in a flaunting livery. Next to him sat two gallants who looked like worn-out rakes of the town, but both handsome, well-made men, whose high-bred manners strangely contrasted with their out-of-elbow appearance. There was a fourth whose glittering habiliments instantly attracted Mervyn's attention. He was a handsome gallant-looking cavalier, verging perhaps on forty, with long curled hair, mustache and beard of the newest cut. His dress was somewhat military, though not strictly the uniform of any service. He wore blue slashed small clothes, high boots, and a scarlet coat richly laced, a collar of the finest work, jewels on his fingers, and a cocked

hat. A long basket-hilted sword hung by his side from a steel band, and a pair of pistols lay at hand on his cloak.

"What! an addition to our company?" exclaimed the gentleman in livery.

"Ay, faith, and a proper addition too, old Rowley," returned Blood. "My nephew, gentlemen, just arrived from foreign parts."

"What, hath he been cooling his heels in the Low Countries, running from the French?" said one of the gallants. "Or hath he been to the Italian, studying the art of cutting throats in the refined manner?"

"Nay, he hath been but lately in France, Saint Wilmot," replied the colonel.

"Oh, I understand—at Paris, learning to poison under Brinvilliers?" replied Wilmot.

"By the mass, no! he looks an honest youth—I say it, though he be thy nephew, Butcherlaw," said the personage styled Rowley. "What say'st thou, boy—art honest as times go?"

"Methinks it will not increase my welcome to this good company, if I say yes," replied Mervyn. "Yet he who says no, is a false knave, and lies."

"Why, then, thou art a very great curiosity,"

said Wilmot. "Honest! prithee, let me see thy face; thou art as rare as a squeaking mandrake."

"You had as well look at a basilisk, for an honest eye must needs shame you to stone," said Mervyn, vehemently, for he was irritated by the mode of this reception.

"Well answered, by these nails!" shouted Rowley. "Come hither, boy; I like thee. Thou hast a ready wit and a daring,—and as times go, these are good qualities. Sit thee here beside me. Methinks there is some favour in thy countenance which I should remember, could I see through the hogshead of punch in my skull. But the image I should recall wavers in its glimmer. Wilmot, whom doth he flavour of?"

"My father must have travelled in England, since I am likened to so many," said Mervyn.

"Faith, Hackum, it strikes me too," said Blood, addressing the cavalier in scarlet, who was gazing with remarkable earnestness at Mervyn. "Deem you not he smacks something of your once master, the lord who murdered himself in the Tower?"

"Say, rather, who was murdered," replied the cavalier, in a low tone. "Sainte Vierge! but 'tis even so. Prithee, boy, look not on me; thine

innocent eyes do seem to reproach my villanous friendship with this man."

"Thy villanous friendship!" exclaimed the colonel, fiercely. "Why, sirrah, did I not get you out of the galleys some short ten years agone, furnish you with the file and the crow-bar, have a boat waiting for you, and finally hide you in Alsatia till the hue and cry was over?"

"And then you took advantage of my despair, and made me what I am," said the cavalier, obviously much excited. "But for the life you gave me, did I not break the oath which bound me to avenge my master's blood in yours?—And have I not repaid the service many times? But, villain, I have shaken thy trammels off again! My master's ghost is here, and I will have thy life or thou mine—so have at thee!"

"Fool!—he is mad with brandy and lemons," said Blood, contemptuously. "Look you, gentlemen, how the chance resemblancce of an Irish nose and eyes to some English ones, long since rotted into dust——"

"What! were you born in Ireland, boy?" said the cavalier, eagerly.

"Faith, I know more of his parentage than he

knows himself," said the colonel. "And I promise you, 'tis a chick from a real Irish egg."

"Tell me, boy, who was thy father?" continued Hackum.

"I had no father, sir, that ever I knew," said Mervyn, innocently.

"Nay there is a proverb concerning that," said Wilmot.

"And born in Ireland?" muttered Hackum.

"Come, come, friend, let not the wine make a fool of thee," said Blood, coaxingly. "Thou knowest it is not safe to jest with me."

"For whoso sups with the devil, should have a long spoon," said Wilmot, laughingly.

"Menace not me, Blood. I despise thee and thy threats," returned the cavalier. "'Slife, thou hast told me lies unnumbered, how thou didst mistake my purpose that night—thought I was sold to the villanous countess, forsooth, and touched with compassion, laboured his rescue! But I did never put faith in thee, and will choke my thoughts no longer! I tell thee, Blood, despite all the enterprises wherein we have been brothers, thou art a black and felonious murtherer!"

"You lie, scoundrel! I did never slay any man

but in fair fight," roared the colonel, yielding to his hitherto suppressed fury.

"Ha, the lie! take it back again with this, thou cruel ruffian!" returned Hackum, and seizing a decanter, he dashed it at Blood's head, but it missed, and fell from the opposite wall in fragments on the floor.

With a savage cry resembling that of some wild beast, Blood sprang forward, his sword flashing out, and meeting that of Hackum with a fury which sent sparks around. The whole company rose in confusion.

"Rochester, Buckingham, part them!" exclaimed Rowley, seizing the colonel's arm. "Blood, I command you, sheathe you slit-bully—what drunken brawl is this? Marry, is the gentleman some partisan of the Ormondes?"

"I am none of the faction—I scorn it," said the cavalier, fiercely. "Unhand me, sirs! 'tis an old quarrel suppressed many years; but there is truth in wine, and I tell you, he is a monstrous atrocious villain, not fit to live."

"Tut, every man knows that: have you nothing new to urge against him?" interposed Rowley in a

peace-making tone. "Heard you ever of man who became a White Friar for his virtues?"

"But the man is a devil!" shouted Hackum, boiling up again, after a glance at the pale and affrighted countenance of Mervyn. "He is a devil, a devil, a devil! confess, thou villain! didst thou not with that felonious hand murder the noble Lord Aumerle, when he was a prisoner in the Tower?"

Blood raised his sword irresolutely, but Rowley held him back; his lips were covered with foam, and he looked black in the face, as if about to fall into a fit.

"What, man alive, art dreaming?" exclaimed Wilmot. "My dear friend, believe me the punch hath flooded your judgment. Why, every body in England knows the Lord Aumerle committed suicide in the Tower, the night of the great fire?"

"Beware, sirrah, beware!" said Blood, his teeth chattering with rage, "or by this light of Heaven, I will reveal who you are!"

"What care I? have you a file of the king's guard at your heels?" returned Hackum. "Gentlemen, I care not; hear me! I am Claude Duval—Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"Claude Duval!" echoed all the gallants with great astonishment.

"Yes, Claude Duval, sirs. Shrink not back—I have met you in friendship, and no man lives who can say that Claude Duval ever betrayed his religion or his friend."

"Are you the great robber?" exclaimed Mervyn. "Why then, I rank myself on your side. For all he says he is my uncle, robbers are of a nearer kindred to me."

"I am proud to make your acquaintance, gallant Duval!" said Rowley, after a moment's pause. "Here is my hand; I have long wished to see you, for of all the rogues in England you are the only one that dares to be a villain like a man."

"Why, so say I," exclaimed Wilmot; "so let us all be sociable and friendly, man; you are in sooth the only honest robber of us all."

"But methinks you wrong your friend, the colonel," said Rowley. "He introduced you as a merry companion to our meeting, and if you be so much a gentleman as we have heard it said, you should not interrupt our fellowship with a private quarrel. Why, man, I was on the jury which judged

my Lord Aumerle a suicide, and we did it on perfect proof. I saw with my own eyes, that it was impossible for any one to have got in to murder him; there were three massive locked doors, man, and unless the colonel could get in at the keyhole—"

"Besides," interrupted Wilmot, "why should he murder him when he had only to leave his dagger's work to the axe of the law?"

"It is a belief which I will stick to in my dying hour," said Claude, in a melancholy voice, and with tears standing in his eyes. "But, gentlemen, as you say, there is no proof—and every man is innocent till he is found out—it will be judged some day!"

"I have borne more from thee, Duval, than ever I thought at any man's hand," said Blood, slowly dropping his sword's point.

"Yes, truly. I am of use to you," replied Duval. "But thank Heaven, you have never coaxed me into any of your bloody deeds, though I have shared more of your crafts and robberies than I shall know how to account for."

"What, were you not with me in the rescue of Captain Mason from the dragoons?" said the colonel with a black smile.

"Ay, but it was man to man, a fair fight," returned Claude.

"Nonsense, man, the wine darkens your better judgment," said Blood sheathing his sword. "And so my quarrel was with the wine, and not with Claude Duval. Here is my hand, sir, and reserve your cold iron for cold hearts."

The persuasions of the company induced Claude, with much reluctance, to accept the offered hand, which was remarkable for huge size and the deformity of its thumb. All then resumed their seats, and the host suddenly made his appearance from under the table, where he had taken refuge. A fresh bowl of punch was ordered in, and Rowley laboured, not without success, to restore the joviality of the meeting. By degrees all recollection of the recent quarrel vanished in copious draughts of the nectar, and Mervyn saw with astonishment that as they grew more and more intoxicated, the belligerents' rancour decreased, until at last they actually embraced each other, protesting they were the best friends in life.

Accustomed to the sobriety and severe decency of manners enforced at St. Omer, almost every word he heard brought blushes to Mervyn's young

cheek, and he sat gazing and listening like an innocent shepherd straying by chance on the orgies of satyrs. The free opinions delivered on all topics —women, religion, laws human and divine—made his ears tingle with shame; but there was something fatally captivating in the licentious vivacity of these gallants. Rowley seemed a man of great humour; there was a satirical depth in what he said which showed a long acquaintance with mankind, and his two companions were evidently men of great parts and brilliant wit. But even these two were distinguished by deep shades of character. Wilmot's wit was bitter, misanthropical, tinged with gloom at times, at others libertine to excess; Villiers's was rather sparkling and ambitious than malignant, yet often extremely sarcastic, especially when rattling away at Wilmot, with whom he waged a continued skirmish of repartees.

Mervyn thought he could discern that these companions were of higher rank than they pretended to be, and there was something of mastery assumed by Rowley, to which all the others seemed to yield. Still he was shocked with the irreligion and blasphemy which all seemed to take pride in displaying. But Rowley continued to drown his scruples

in laughter and wine. In vain he resisted; he was jeered at as a milksop, and forced to swallow glass on glass, till excited by the liquor, and his own natural vivacity, he launched out in a style of daring which, from its freshness, seemed to delight those wild companions.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT IN ALSATIA.

"Thou art a merry little dog, Ichabod, with thy Jewish name!" said Rowley, throwing himself back in his chair. "Methinks I shall love thee, and be of service to thee."

"Canst thou eat mutton, child, then?" said Wilmot, smiling. "If so, thy fortune is made."

"Ay, that can I, but fat ven'son better," replied Mervyn.

"Fore Heaven, Rowley, and is not this better than churning our brains to curds in the whirligig of state affairs?" said Villiers, blowing the froth from his punch into Rowley's plate.

"Yea, this is the only life for men of sense—an it would last for ever," said Wilmot with a sigh. "What sings old sage Anacreon?

"Could gold prolong our life's brief span,
One moment snatch from fate,
I, too, would heap the glittering dross;
I, too, toil early—late;
That if Death chanced to journey nigh,
He might take something and pass by.

But if one cannot purchase life,
Why sigh in vain and weep?
And if Death's steps are fated, how
Can gold resist his sweep?
So be it mine to grow divine,
'Mid genial friends, in purple wine!"

"I have noted thee, Jack, these latter times," said Rowley, as Wilmot concluded his recitation. "And take my word for it, thou wilt not die in the jolly fellow's faith. Thou wilt repent and turn a whiner."

"Of a surety and verily, for his spirit quaileth," said Villiers with a sanctimonious twang. "Mind you not last summer when he had the fever, how he winced, and called in the harsh Scotch canter, Burnet, to pray by his bedside?"

"The devil was sick then, gallants," replied Wilmot. "Well, well, fill up your glasses—but though it be a merry life to lead, I doubt me if it end in so cheery a death."

"Pooh, pooh, man, enjoy life while it lasts, and take death when it comes," said Blood. "Why, Jack, the saint and the sinner both come to the same thing—a statue cut in flesh, that's all."

"I warrant me, you have chiselled many such a statue with your dagger and Toledo, Blood," said Duval. "And to my thought, I can see one of your handiwork even now."

"What canst thou see, fool?" said the colonel, giving a fearful glance round the apartment, and with a forced laugh he began sipping his wine.

"Let us have no more of that folly, gentlemen," interrupted Rowley. "But no marvel we are turning into the green and yellow leaves of discourse: our punchbowl is empty as an honest man's purse.—Mine host, look to it."

"Punch for ever!" exclaimed Simon, bustling up. "I wonder if the water boiled last bowl—methought it smacked too much of the lemons." And he tottered out with the nectar pot, as Wilmot called it.

"Come, come, Claude, murder or no murder, 'tis ten years agone," said Rowley, watching the melancholy musing countenance of Duval. "And as the rascal Scot says, let bygones be bygones; though by the by, they themselves never forgive. Cheer up, Jack!—what avails looking so sad, man?—Why art so down in the muzzle?"

"Faith, my lord, I have been in better spirits," replied Wilmot with an absent smile. "My health fails, and methinks, if what Dr. Lloyd warns me be true, I shall die a horrible death."

"Why, man, you are still in the summer of your days," said Rowley, cheerfully. "'Tis time enough to repent when you can do no better—at worst, 'tis but turning Catholic and getting absolved. Besides, if you are damned, lad, 'tis in rare good company. What says old Shirley? since you have given us a slice of Anacreon."

He then began singing, or, rather, murmuring, the fine stanzas, which are recorded to have been his favourites, in the Contention of Ajax and Ulysses.

"The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate:
Death lays his icy hands on kings:

Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

"I would your grace had a better voice—you have a good will," said Wilmot, whose eyes were full of tears and wine. "Well, well, I shall not live very long to wish so, and when I die I shall go to the devil—eh, Blood?"

"An there be such a person, doubtless," replied the colonel, carelessly. "But hang it, here comes old Simon with the punch—so no more words—they interrupt drinking."

"And now," said Rowley, after a moment's pause in the conversation, "tell us, Blood, how dost thou prosper with that affair in the Tower thou wottest of?"

"My liege!" exclaimed the colonel, in an alarmed tone.

"How! thy liege? Am I the devil or the Duke of Monmouth?" said Rowley, sharply.

"Why, I do prosper mightily, sir," said Blood. "I have paid the old keeper sundry visits, and he is thoroughly persuaded that I am a most religious puritanical Baxterian divine. And I have broached a small matter how I will wed a son of his—a rough

sea-captain—to a fair daughter of mine, that is rich by some grandmother's will."

"And doth the poor old man really take thee, with thy villanous countenance, for a man of decency and morals?" said Wilmot.

"Yea, and we do discourse godly matters, in the perfect style of the saints, so that it is a balm out of Gilead to hear us in spiritual communion," said Blood in a hypocritical whine. "But how is this, my masters?—our punchbowl dry again, and I have never lipped it!"

"Go, Simon, and mix us a little more of the pleasantness of lemons with the strength of brandy, and look that thou put less water, and yet that it be filled," said Rowley, with great solemnity.

"Ay, ay, more punch I warrant me—merry gallants, good troth," stammered the host feebly, and laughing with a tipsy silliness. "So, so—I promise you I know my way. There's one of my eyes sober yet."

But honest Simon had scarcely moved from his chair ere he fell prone, punchbowl and all. Rowley picked him up, but all efforts to sober him were in vain, and they were obliged to let him snore in his

chair. They then rang a bell on the table, and Mrs. Temperance entered, somewhat excited herself. She demurred, however, to the demand for more punch. "Ye have drunk enough, gallants," she said, resolutely, "and I don't know how I'm to be paid. There's the colonel here owes me a three months' score, and I have never, as I'm a Christian woman, seen an angel of it."

"Nay, now, woman, what foolery's this?" said Blood; "would you shame me before my guests? Thou shalt be paid all in good time; and meanwhile dost thou not owe me a kiss, for slapping my cheek this morn till it blushed!"

And seizing the hostess by her shoulders and stout waist, Blood inflicted a very hearty salute. This seemed to mollify Mrs. Temperance, and calling him a "deceivous honey of a man," and her husband "an ugly little snoozling porker," she picked up the broken punchbowl and made her exit.

"I pity thee, Blood," said Wilmot; "'tis a penance to wipe out half thy sins, having to kiss such lips for thy board."

"I would not for my life," added Rowley, groaning.

"Faith, your grace can afford to say so," replied the colonel, "seeing you have the pick of London's fairest ladies."

"Why, man, thou must be enviable by the king himself, favourite as he is among the fair English dames!" exclaimed Claude Duval, awaking from a long revery, during which he sat contemplating Mervyn's countenance.

"Nay, come, I am not so much to be envied, an it were all known," muttered Rowley, in a discontented tone, "for what says old James Shirley? my father, that had not wit enough to keep his head on his shoulders, loved him well.

> "The glories of our birth and state
> Are shadows, not sub———"

"Gadskilly! what manner of chant is this for Alsatia?" exclaimed a new voice, and following Mrs. Temperance and the punchbowl, entered an exceedingly handsome young man, wearing the uniform of the king's guard, but apparently disordered in some recent scuffle.

"Good now, gentlemen, excuse me," said Mrs. Temperance. "Indeed I cannot help it. This young gentleman comes me roystering in, and understand-

ing what good company ye were by the tingling of your glasses—"

"Oh, make no pardonnez-mois, good hostess," interrupted the young officer, "all rogues are brothers in Alsatia. I have just killed my man in Holborn, and ran here for shelter, where I know that virtue never lacks it—till my friends make the matter up."

"Thou killed thy man! surely thou hast begun early, my slashing blade!" exclaimed Rowley. "But no matter! As I said before, an the devil come he is welcome. Bring him a tankard, mother Temperance—name but not thing; but that is the age's fashion."

"What had the man done to rouse thy wrath, thou sweet epitome of the times?" said Wilmot. "Had he trod on thy corn, or sworn that thou lackest beard, as, by my blue garter, thou dost most smockishly!"

"Nay, not so bad as that, or I had eaten him too," replied the young homicide; "he but called my mistress no better than she should be, and it was the truth too; but it suited not with mine honour to hear it said."

"And prithee what green girl hath thee in leading, for lack of a monkey?" said Wilmot.

"Oh, I can tell you she is none of your small fry," said the officer. "I know two great men that have shown a great deal of folly to win her smiles, and there is a third, a very great man indeed, who would give the world, an it were in his gift, to keep her faithfully his."

"Here's some new scandal of our virtuous court," said Rowley, winking at his companions. "What nobles are these that do affect thy Dulcinea? Are they of the rogues in, or the rogues out—court or country—speak!"

"Oh, they are notorious for being any thing that hath a relish of villany in it," replied the fugitive. "To-day they are for the king and court, but what they may be to-morrow depends on the winds and weather. Yet men say they have good head-pieces, and they are reputed (though it may be falsely) to be the sons of two notorious profligates, my lords of Buckingham and Rochester."

"Villain, thou liest!" exclaimed both Wilmot and Villiers, starting up and clapping their hands on their swords.

"Peace, gentlemen!" exclaimed Rowley, laughing heartily. "And you, sir soldier, restrain your choleric valour, when I tell you that these worship-

ful squires are servants to those two great lords, and love them so well that they hold nothing dearer in earth or heaven."

"Oh, I thought by their look they could be nothing better," said the officer, contemptuously, and sheathing his half-drawn sword.

"Sit down, sir, and drink to the drowning of all unkindness," exclaimed Rowley. "Odd's fish! he takes me sharp enough on the word! But prithee what great man do you speak of, and what is your lady's name, that we may drink her health in a bumper?"

"That is a secret everywhere but in our mess-room," replied the young officer. "But I'll not drink your punch for nothing, for I'll teach you to reform your singing. Is that doleful ditty of Shirley's a song for Alsatia? And when there's so choice a novelty composed by that rogue, Sedley? Listen to it, and join chorus: 'tis very wicked and pleasant."

He then sang, in an extremely sweet but feminine voice, the following song:

THE JOLLY WHITE FRIARS.

"We are all jolly friars—well met, brother rogue!
Though the name's out of fashion, the thing's much in vogue;

For stripp'd of the surplice, the robe, or the sword,
The devil can't tell a whipp'd thief from my lord;
And if truth may be sung, if 'twere not for the name,
My lady and Bess are extremely the same:
So, jolly White Friars, our toast shrink from never—
Here's success to all rogues—Wine and Woman for ever!

We are all jolly friars—ne'er blush, brother knave!
'Tis a title as common and old as the grave;
If the priest call you infidel, laugh in his face,
And ask him, what were he without his grimace.
If the soldier call coward, the lawyer cry thief,
Ask them both what they are without red-coat or brief.
So, jolly White Friars, our toast will fail never—
Here's success to all rogues—Wine and Woman for ever!"

"A very good song and very well sung," said Rowley, eyeing the young officer with a ludicrous mixture of drunkenness and curiosity. "But prithee, there's a sweet fellow of thine inches, do tell us what wench is this whom those two great lords affect? I'll never betray thee; thou knowest there is honour among thieves, and whoever trusts me trusts a rogue."

"Nay, youth, it were not consonant to the excellent honour of thy recent murther and future expectations, to betray thy lady's confidence," said Villiers, eagerly.

"Nay, she told it not in confidence; all the

town may know but her foolish Limberwell," replied the officer, laughing. "Look here—I show it in all companies—'tis a present she made me this morning, laughing very heartily at the fond Solomon who gave it her scarce an hour before!" And he threw down a diamond armlet of exquisite workmanship and brilliancy.

"A present to thee!" exclaimed Rowley, snatching at it fiercely. "Why, thou girl-faced popinjay, thou liest worse than the Black One! A present to thee! Rogue, thou hast stolen it."

"Stolen it! I scorn the word," replied the officer, contemptuously, "and but that I see you are mildewed with liquor—why, I tell you, man, 'twas Mistress Gwyn that gave it me, swearing she would never have parted with it but to a fellow of my infinite merit."

"What Nell Gwyn—Nelly Gwyn!" exclaimed Rowley, stuttering with rage. "Why then—I say—odd's life, I'll never stand it! Give me the bracelet, boy, and I'll see thee hung yet an I be not myself."

"Only with my life will I surrender it," retorted the youth, putting the bracelet in his bosom, and cocking his hat fiercely.

"Why then, with thy life," returned Rowley, making a successful catch. "And now, an thou wouldst win it back, out with thy rapier. I'll not show the white feather so soon as the chicken thou hast killed by surprise."

"Marry, I'm tired of killing for this sunset," said the officer, carelessly. "But now you know the lady's name, gentlemen, you surely have not the confidence to deny what I have asserted of you—of you, false nobles! for you are not disguised so much by these beggar's clothes as ye are in your earl's mantles."

"I will not brook so base a libel in this presence!" exclaimed Villiers, springing up and drawing his sword.

"'Tis a scandal on human nature," said Wilmot, drawing his blade simultaneously.

"Fie on you, gentlemen! the odds are not fair, and I'll stand on the youth's side," said Claude, flashing his sword out, and waving it in a graceful flourish.

"And I'll throw this bottle at any body's head that touches him," exclaimed Mervyn, seizing a decanter, and blushing scarlet with indignation.

"Faith, brothers, thanking ye, I need no aid," said the officer with perfect sang-froid. "I'll make mincemeat of him who stirs, for or against me—skewer ye on my sword like kidneys. Zounds, sirs, do you think I am to be bullied by a parcel of poor knaves in a Ram-alley tavern?"

"Why, what proof canst thou allege, rogue! that we—that I, Buckingham, could ever so betray my royal master?" exclaimed Villiers.

"Or that I?" shouted Wilmot.

"Why, since you challenge me to the proof, my lords, here is one not easily refuted," said the seeming officer laughing, and taking off his hat he shook a shower of rich golden ringlets over his beautiful face. "Ye may stare, sweet gentlemen, but methinks I should be able to report the truth concerning Nell Gwyn's sweethearts, eh?"

"Why, Nell, Nell, 'slife, what manner of wild prank is this?" exclaimed Rowley, dropping his sword.

"Why, Charles, Charles, what manner of wild prank is this?" returned the eccentric beauty. "Are you turned squire of Alsatia? Is this a proper place for the majesty of England to harbour in? Shame

on ye, lords, to bring your king to these roguish haunts of yours, and peril the safety of England on the point of some rude taverner's sword!"

"Nell, Nell, thou art the indiscreetest creature!" ejaculated the king, catching her in his arms. "And the sweetest officer!—but, Nell, these rattlesome pranks of thine will undo thee some day."

"Est-il possible! are you the king, Mr. Rowley?" exclaimed Claude. "But king or cobbler, you are a hearty good fellow, and that's better. Sweet mistress Nell, I do commend me, as a sometime acquaintance, to your recollection."

"And, Claude, thou art a good fellow too in thy way," said the king, rising with dignity. "But for all that, if I catch thee in my sheriffs' clutches, thou shalt as certainly swing for it as the sun sets that day."

"And, Charles, thou art a better fellow than nine-tenths of the rogues that wear crowns," replied Claude, who was much intoxicated. "But if I catch thee alone, and ease thee not of thy purse, the sun shall never rise that morrow."

"It were scarce worth the pains," said Charles, good-humouredly.

"But, sweet mistress Nell, beseech you," said

Wilmot, in his most blandishing tone. "You do not mean to accuse us to his majesty of such treason?"

"Yea, and half the men of the court," replied Nell, with a roguish look, which made both the nobles smile and colour too. "But the best of ye got but a tart speech, or it may be the tag-end of an old song for your pains—

> "Nay, never blush brother knave!
> 'Tis a title as common and old as the grave!"

sung she off.

"Tut, sirs, I forgive ye—ye are men like the rest," interrupted Charles. "But it is full time we were wagging. Nell, thou hast brought me back to my senses. Here's mine arm, thou spruce little soldier—hast any conveyance at hand?"

"My barge waits at the stairs below, and the men will know none of us in these disguises," replied Nell; "so let us to Whitehall with all diligence! 'Tis a bet between me and my lady Castlemaine, and I have won it."

"Come with us, lords," said Charles, smiling. "Farewell, Duval; rob only rogues, and the whole human race are thy bankers. Blood, look to thy nephew: see how heavy sleep hangs on his fine

eyes; and bring him with thee to court, when thou art sufficiently out of trouble to come there thyself."

These words broke up the disorderly revelry. The king, his courtiers, and Nell Gwyn, took their way down the Friary to embark for Whitehall; and mine host being roused, was with difficulty made to understand that he was to prepare a bed for the young kid, as he called him. A truckle bed, in a garret destitute of all other furniture save rats, two or three old saddles, and some bundles of hay, was then prepared for Mervyn; but miserable as was the accommodation he was so exhausted with fatigue and drink that he dropped asleep the instant he lay down upon it.

Blood and Duval prolonged their festival to a later hour; Mrs. Temperance was snoring on the stairs, and old Simon himself literally *fell* asleep with a lighted candle in his hand, on the threshold of Mervyn's garret. Luckily it was extinguished in the fall, and the night past with marvellous tranquillity—considering.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNNATURAL MOTHER.

LATE on the following morning Mervyn was awakened by the entrance of some person into his garret; and, starting up, he saw, with dazzled eyes, a figure which he at first mistook for a Jew. It was clothed in a long mantle of green baize, with a slouching Spanish hat, and had a short grizzly beard, though the eyebrows were unnaturally black. A sort of pedler's pack was slung on his back, containing a few articles such as the Jews at that period were wont to hawk about the streets.

"Get up, boy," he said, in a tone which Mervyn instantly recognised. "It is late, and good luck is

waiting for you. I intend to introduce you to a most noble lady, a friend of mine, who may, perchance, put you in a way of advancement."

"Colonel Blood!" exclaimed Mervyn, with an involuntary shudder.

"Thou marvellest to see me thus 'guised?" said the colonel. "The truth is, I dare not step out of the Sanctuary without some precautions. But make no delay; dress thyself and join me suddenly in the room below, where I am breakfasting."

Mervyn obeyed, though with a reluctance which increased with every reflection that he made as he proceeded. The events of the previous night swam in his memory like a dream, and for some moments he could scarcely think it otherwise; so improbable did it appear to him that the king and nobles of so great a country as England could thus degrade their dignity.

Blood, however, allowed him but little time to reflect on his situation. He shouted to him to come down, in a harsh voice which he dared not disobey He found a substantial breakfast, which they partook in almost total silence, and then Blood made preparations for a sortie. Mervyn watched his toilet with some curiosity. He put on a wig which

fell in long matted locks on his shoulders, and muffled up his jaws with an old shawl, so that little was visible but his fierce eyes. Then after a morning draught with little Simon, they took their way down Water-lane. The colonel took a boat at the stairs, and giving the men directions where to go, stretched himself lazily at the prow, while Mervyn sat silently watching the brilliant play of the sun on the waters.

Aumerle House was the place named by Blood, which, as he had heard the name before, under peculiar circumstances, rather excited Mervyn's attention. They landed at Westminster Stairs, whence Blood, keeping a sharp look out on his young companion, turned down a series of streets and gardens—perhaps with a view to bewilder him—and emerged at length before a lordly mansion, whose gardens descended to the river. It was of an antique style of architecture, rich and elaborate, like that which distinguished the era of Henry VII. and was environed with all the appurtenances of the highest rank and luxury. Embroidered porters opened the gate, and a crowd of menials appeared in the hall beyond, gaming or playing on musical instruments, apparently for their own amusement.

Mervyn was surprised at the ease with which they obtained admittance to this palace, Blood merely muttering a few cabalistical words to the porter, as they passed into the hall. A nimble page instantly darted before them to announce their approach, and they followed in silence through a series of antique but very magnificent apartments. They paused at length at the entrance of an apartment defended by a large gilded screen, where the page motioned them to wait his return.

Blood amused himself in the mean time by peeping between the chinks of the screen, an example which Mervyn followed. He perceived a room of great extent, the walls of which were of dark oak, elaborately carved, and broken into deep recesses of emblazoned windows. At the farther end was a projecting fireplace, also most richly carved in oak, in which was a bright fire in a silver grate, moulded to represent a dragon. Beside this, in a huge velvet chair, sat a lady embroidering lace in a frame. Little of her countenance could be discerned, but Mervyn saw that she was pale. Her dress was extremely rich, consisting of black velvet, laced in gold to the knee; and from the flash of the firelight occasionally, he thought she wore many and rich jewels. Mervyn watched the page as he re-

verently approached, and saw that the lady started at the name he pronounced, and turning suddenly, he beheld a countenance of great beauty, but deeply care-worn, and remarkable for the gloom and hauteur of its expression.

The page returned instantly, with a message that the Lady Howard desired Master Isaac to approach with his eastern drug, which he said was so excellent to cause sleep. Desiring Mervyn to tarry with the pack, Blood stepped feebly forward, leaving the youth in his distant station behind the screen.

At first Blood feigned to move up the chamber with the slow step and decrepit bend natural to the age he assumed; but, when out of earshot, he suddenly resumed his bold stride and approached the lady without any of those reverential observances which her high rank seemed to demand. It appeared as if she noticed this, for she waved her hand impatiently, and said,

"Friend Isaac, methinks if we have any observers, thou art near enough for thine assumed office. Prithee, what new mystery is this? What drug hath thy pernicious hand gathered, to lay balm on a bleeding conscience?"

"I come, madam," replied the pretended Jew, "to

crave some small supply from your generosity, to baffle for a time the fangs of famine, which are ready to seize on me."

"I have told you already, Mr. Blood, you have exhausted both my compassion, and the means of gratifying it," replied the lady. "You know well whether or not I have repaid the—the service—which it was my direful misfortune to need at your hands; and you are but too well aware that my Lord Howard's extravagances leave me but little even for mine own urgent wants, and the maintenance of his great household. I cannot supply the extravagance of all the mad profligates in London. I presume, Mr. Blood, you will next command me to give bail before the parliament on your notable cause with his grace of Ormonde?"

"Methinks my services might demand even that recompense, madam," replied the colonel, resolutely. "Who is it that hath given you the happiness and freedom of your present life?—this gorgeous palace—these ample revenues—the man you love? Where were you now, but for one bold hand and unflinching heart?—In brief, lady, I must have money, and you cannot in gratitude—you dare not in policy—refuse me! What I need is a mere trifle, to pre-

serve an old friend from starvation—absolute starvation!"

"Why, two pieces of copper a day might do that," replied the lady, bitterly. "But I know you too well, Blood, to think that you limit your demands to an anchorite's prayer. You are a man of spirit, lead a gay life, have your quality intrigues! But, sir, I tell you, I will no longer be the slave of your menaces. Do your worst!—what can you do?"

"What can I do?" repeated Blood with a dark smile. "I will answer you, lady. I can with a breath, a word, precipitate you from wealth, magnificence, honour and love—into poverty, shame, detestation! The heir of Aumerle—the rightful heir—lives, and I have it in my power to restore him to all his rights."

"Thou liest, unearthly villain, thou liest!" exclaimed the countess, turning deadly pale. "The heir of Aumerle was drowned—burned—whelmed at once by fire and water! You yourself, monster, assured me of this, with all the pledges that could bind even the fiend to truth."

"And so I thought myself at the time, lady," said the colonel, calmly. "But I was deceived. It was an ancient and good maxim of the Cardinal

Richelieu never to believe his enemy dead till he saw his carcass. Who ever found the body of young Reginald? No, lady, I warn you. The waves and fire have given up their prey, and in the saint's language, he may perchance prove—the avenger of blood!"

"Methinks that were small advantage to you, colonel," said Lady Howard with a spasmodic smile.

"And still less to you, madam, for you have more to lose," answered Blood. "And surely the hand that sharpens the knife is as guilty as that which plunges it?"

"I have been but too much accustomed to this language from your mouth to resent it," said the countess. "But who, let me ask you, Mr. Blood, would listen to such an accusation from such a tongue? But you say, the heir of Aumerle lives! Let us see this heir—where is he?"

"Speak low, madam, or he will hear you," said Blood, calmly. "He is here, in this house, in this hall of his ancestors—a stranger!"

"What mean you, audacious man?" exclaimed Lady Howard with a quivering spasm of her whole frame.

"Be not alarmed, lady," said Blood; "as yet he

knows nothing of his birth nor of the events which have made him a wretched foundling, depending on charity for life and bread."

"A pleasantly-imagined romance, Master Colonel," said the countess with a laugh in which there was no mirth. "But think not to make me the fool of a sorry imposture. I can produce against your new testimony that which you gave at the trial of Claude Duval—that you saw *him* perish—for which testimony you received two thousand pounds from my hand."

"A pleasant document, methinks, to be produced in a court of justice by a mother! But I have writings which, without implicating myself, would overthrow all your defences. In brief, Claude Duval saved the child, and transferred it safely to St. Omer, though, to baffle our bloodhound scent, he stated, at his trial, that it perished on the night of the great fire. And, briefly, I have inveigled the youth into my power, to be used as I please, or rather, madam, as you determine."

"I see it all; 'tis a base forgery, coined to extort money," said the countess, vehemently. "But think not, Blood, think not any longer to play upon the strings of terror in my woman's heart; you have

worn them out. God help me! I do scarce care if you accomplish the worst your hate can threaten—which methinks I suffer in the fearing."

"Force me not to that pass, Lady Howard, or it will be ill for both," said the colonel. "You forget that I am a man of sudden resolves, and though I sold you the jewels and precious documents found in Duval's cloak, I reserved certain papers for mine own use."

"Villain!—but 'tis all the coinage of thy false heart!" exclaimed the countess, passionately.

"Nay then, you shall not doubt it; you shall see him," said Blood. "Ho there—Ichabod!"

"One moment, Blood, one moment!" ejaculated the lady, turning perfectly white. "Is he—is he—like *him?*"

"The late earl?—judge for yourself," replied the colonel. "Ichabod!"

Mervyn emerged from behind the screen, and advanced with the timidity and hesitation natural to one so unaccustomed to the world, his fine complexion mantling with a deep blush. The countess collected herself by a strong effort, and though she was still deadly pale, her eyes were fixed upon him with a wild intensity which increased his confusion. What

thoughts were passing in her mind! what a confusion of recollections! what vivid contrasts of what *was* with what *might have been*, as Mervyn, her disowned and only child, stood before her! Even Blood grew somewhat alarmed at the length and fixedness of this scrutiny, but he was too perfect a master of dissimulation to suffer any emotion to be visible.

"Madam," he said, after a moment's pause, "here is the young orphan of whom I spoke."

"Pray you, good youth," said the countess, hurriedly, "stand forward in the light."

"What ails you, madam?" said Blood; for, as the light fell on Mervyn's face, the countess uttered a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Nothing, nothing!" said the lady, shutting her eyes with a strong shudder. "Blood, are you man or devil, to gaze unblenchingly on that face?" she added, in a stifled whisper.

"A comely youth indeed, as you say, my lady," replied the colonel, in an unaltered tone. "Indeed there are not lacking men who say that he something resembles your own illustrious family of Aumerle."

"What is your name, youth, and of what lineage?" said the countess, after a pause.

"My name is Mervyn, madam," replied the youth, in a voice which thrilled through the countess's nerves.

"Mervyn! ay, but your Christian name; surely you have two names?" she said, hastily.

"I never heard myself called aught but Mervyn, yet Colonel Blood says my name is Ichabod."

"What! have you no father, child?" said the countess, leaning forward, and gazing in his face as if she could read into his very soul.

"I had neither father nor mother, ever to know them," he murmured, with the same lingering sadness of tone.

"Nor mother!" repeated Lady Howard, with a glance at Blood. "Nor mother! You hear him, Blood, and my heart does not break!" continued the countess, in a low tone; "prithee let him go, ere it swell too full of anguish, and burst my breast."

"Mervyn," said the colonel, gently, "the noble lady likes you, and may hereafter do something for you. Now kiss her ladyship's hand and retire."

"No, no, I cannot, I may not!" exclaimed the countess, starting from her chair as if at the approach of a serpent. "On your life, touch me not, boy!

I mean," she added, with an hysteric laugh—"I am afraid, for they say the malign spotted fever is still rife in that unwholesome district whence you come; —not that I fear it,—not that I fear it!" And she laughed long and wildly, until, sinking exhaustedly into her chair, a shower of tears came to her relief.

"Retire, Mervyn; my lady Howard is subject to these fits," said the unrelenting colonel; "especially when she sees a youth of your figure; for many years ago she lost a son, who, had he lived, would have been much of thy inches."

Mervyn bowed humbly to the lady, and resumed his distant station behind the screen.

"Well, madam, are you convinced?" said Blood, as the boy disappeared, "or must I bring those written proofs in play which will surely reinstate him in all that should rightfully be his?"

"Is this then the drug to restore me the calm sleep whereof your too ready villany deprived me for ever?" said Lady Howard, passionately.

"They who dice with fate, lady, must stand the hazard of the throw," replied he, significantly. "But take not on so sadly; all may be well again if you but will it."

"Speak—what would you? I am the slave of

your spell," said the countess, in a tone of deep despair.

"Lady Howard," replied the colonel, apparently omewhat moved by her emotion, "beautiful lady! for whom I have perilled soul and body, lured by what magic I dare not now remind you! nothing but my extreme necessity should force me to use this engine against you."

"Well, what do you need, sir?" said the countess, in the same tranquil tone of despair. "Cost what it will, I must conceal that horrid by-gone from Howard; I cannot afford to lose the only heart that loves me."

"Five hundred guineas will deliver you for ever from my importunities," replied Blood.

"Five hundred guineas! Well, it is but gold," ejaculated the lady. "And yet Howard but now craved a smaller sum of me in vain. But wilt thou swear to me (for I have known thee true to thy oath, through perils which would have dashed to pieces the faith of honester men)—wilt thou swear never to trouble me more on this account?"

Blood uttered an asseveration which made even Lady Howard shudder. She then drew her chair to the table, where there was a silver standish, and began

writing, while Blood continued to gaze on her beautiful countenance, which, flushed as it was with violent emotion, was still indescribably lovely. Suddenly, however, she paused, and seemed lost in revery; then, raising her eyes to his, with an expression so emphatic that it needed not words to make her meaning apparent, she murmured in a hollow, unearthly tone, "Understand me without speech! Wouldst thou for twice, for thrice,—this sum,—*rid me of this care—for ever?*"

As Blood stared in astonishment at her words, she divined the meaning of his looks, and continued—"Nay, not that—Heaven forbid!" said the countess, hurriedly, and relapsing into deadly whiteness. "But there are other means—the plantations! Oh, Blood, Blood, you know not to what madness I am driven! And it is too late to repent—too late!—What if this boy be the destined avenger of his father's—"

"Suicide?" said Blood, calmly filling the pause. "But no, it is impossible. He knows nothing of his birth, suspects nothing. Trouble yourself no more about him; he shall never even dream what may offend you. Henceforth your troubles with both of us are over—and I kiss your fair hand on my oath."

And saying this, the colonel gallantly raised her hand to his lips, and pressing it with a little Irish warmth, she withdrew it abruptly, and with displeasure visible in the dark flash of her eye. He affected not to notice this, but quietly examined the paper, and muttering that he should have preferred gold, bowed to the lady's impatient waive, and moved a few steps as if to retire. He returned, however, so suddenly that the countess started.

"You are alarmed, madam," he said in a deep warning tone. "But keep your faith with me, and you have no cause. Attempt not the life of this orphan, for if you do, I shall know that mine own is in jeopardy. So long as his person remains uninjured, I will never cross this threshold without your permission; but the instant *that* is attempted I will hunt, harass, let myself loose upon you! So look to it."

Saying this, he passed into the antechamber; motioned Mervyn to follow him; and passed into the street, attended by his young victim.

END OF VOL. I.

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